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Keeping close to home

The faith and retention of Presbyterian emerging adults in Northern Ireland.

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**Keeping close to home:
the faith and retention of Presbyterian emerging adults in Northern Ireland.**

By

Graeme Campbell Thompson

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

King's College London

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Abstract

Like most western Christian churches, many young people in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland do not retain their active church connection into adulthood. No study has previously examined this issue within Irish Presbyterianism and this research sought to identify the important factors in encouraging faith and sustained church attendance in emerging adults.

An examination of the denomination's theology and history demonstrates the foundational importance of covenant theology, but also a decline in the practical outworking of that, and a decrease in the numbers of young people active in the denomination. To examine this situation, 98 online questionnaires were completed by 18-25 year olds from a 10% representative sample of Presbyterian congregations in Northern Ireland and 9 structured interviews were conducted to provide richer data.

The concepts of faith capital, spiritual individualisation, agency and structure were confirmed as being important in emerging adults reaching spiritual maturity. No one factor was identified as responsible for their disconnection from church and some evidence was found that suggests that those who leave may not be lost permanently, as non-attendance may not mean loss of faith. The research indicates that each individual's chance of retaining church attendance and faith depends on their unique experience of family faith nurture and opportunity to participate in intergenerational faith community in a way which recognises their individuality in a developmentally appropriate way.

The covenant theological context of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has the potential to retain the active involvement of young people by rediscovering its theological origins and practising them in a 21st Century way. This can be achieved through encouraging faith nurture at home and developing intergenerational faith communities where adolescents and emerging adults can engage meaningfully with the significance of the sacraments and fully participate in church life.

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Chapter 1 - The history of PCI: origins of theological belief and practice

Introduction

'We can understand the present more fully when we have looked at the past'

Rev Ronnie Craig, 1980

Any attempt to research and understand the place of Northern Irish young people in the specific context of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland requires a clear understanding of the roots and influences of the denomination. There are several unique aspects to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, (P.C.I.¹) though it has undergone many of the same momentous changes as the wider church in the West. Tracing the development of the Presbyterian Church and the way the structures of youth ministry have been formed will set the framework for many of the questions for this study.

The practical theology of a denomination ought to reflect its theological foundations, so this chapter will examine the formation and development of P.C.I. and, in particular, the importance and implications of its covenant theology. In this, children and young people are placed in a very significant place at the heart of an intergenerational community of faith, therefore the sacramental and practical expressions of this will be given particular attention. Consideration will also be given to how faith and doctrine are passed on to children and young people and to the special place of the Christian family home within Presbyterianism.

A brief history of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Theological and radical beginnings

The origins of P.C.I. were the establishment of congregations by largely Presbyterian Scottish settlers to County Down and County Antrim in the early 17th century (Holmes 2000; Barclay 1959). The first Presbytery on Irish soil was established by chaplains and elders from Scots army regiments in 1642 (Barclay 1959). Significantly, this happened just a year before the meeting of the 'Westminster Assembly of Divines' who established the textual foundations of reformed Presbyterianism, the Westminster Confession and Larger and Shorter Catechisms (Barclay 1959). A Synod was established in Ulster in 1690, a time when Presbyterians were a distinctive group who 'saw themselves as a separate community and a covenanted people' (Holmes 2006, p.306).

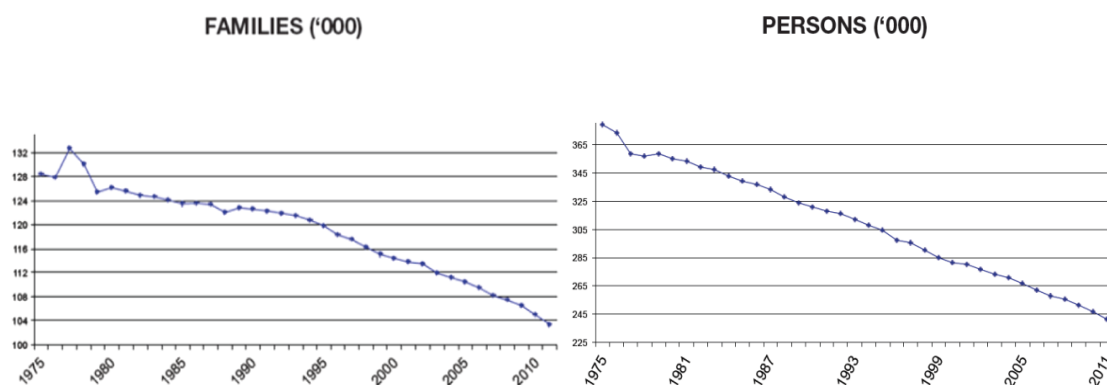
¹ The Presbyterian Church in Ireland will be abbreviated to P.C.I. through most of this thesis

In 1741 the first Seceder congregation was formed due to theological, ecclesiastical and political differences; however, by 1840 the Seceder 'Presbyterian Synod of Ireland' was unified with the Synod of Ulster to form the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (Holmes 2006). This union came about at a time of ongoing religious and evangelical revival and 'the principles underlying the union reflected a desire to return to the doctrine and practices of 17th Century Scottish Presbyterianism' (Holmes 2006, p.310). These include the authority of Scripture, the Presbyterian form of government and discipline, as well as the full subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith by all office-bearers and solely public baptism; all of these continue to characterise Presbyterianism today. So, although the denomination as it exists now is approaching its 175th anniversary, the roots of Presbyterianism in Ulster date back to long before that and an appreciation of the historical shape and culture of the denomination is essential to the full understanding of practical theology as it relates to children and young people.

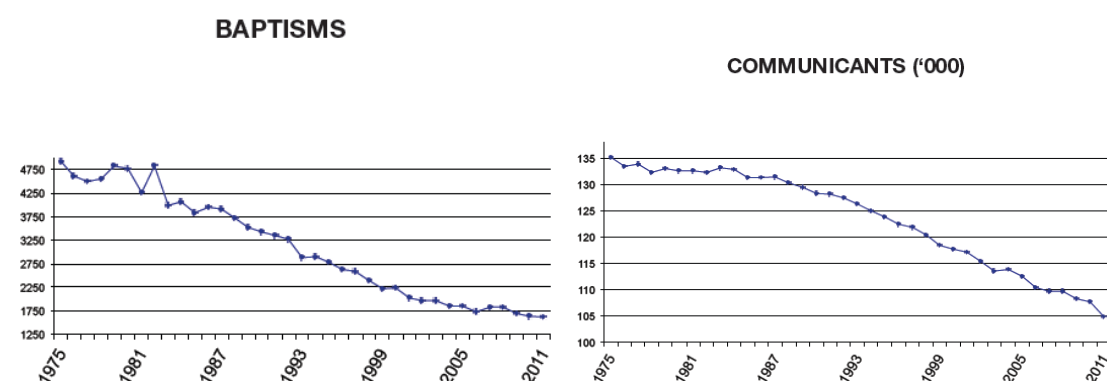
Holmes examines the period 1770 – 1840 and concludes that there were three principle influences from then which have shaped Presbyterian belief and practice: tradition, (both theological and cultural), reform and revival, particularly the great revival of 1859 which continues to be revered in many parts of the denomination today (2006, p.3). Before examining the theology and practice in more detail, it is useful to consider the wider development of the denomination.

The rise and decline of Presbyterianism in Ireland

During the past century Presbyterianism has continued to be the largest Protestant denomination in Ireland, but has suffered the same recent numerical decline as other denominations; however it is interesting to consider the statistical details. Even half a century ago, the 'Statistical Survey of Sunday Schools and Youth Work' in 1966 highlighted 'the general downward trend in the Presbyterian Population of Ireland since the census of 1861' (Falkiner 1966, p.4). Although, the denomination's own statistics show that decline has continued steadily since the 1960s, it is interesting to note that there had in fact been something of a post-war resurgence in church membership. It is very difficult to accurately understand the decrease in numbers in terms of the traditional Presbyterian unit of measurement 'families', but the number of individual 'persons' according to Presbyterian Church official statistics may be a more useful indicator, (figures 1.1 and 1.2).



Figures 1.1 and 1.2 reproduced from the Annual Reports to the Presbyterian General Assembly 2012



Figures 1.3 and 1.4 reproduced from the Annual Reports to the Presbyterian General Assembly 2012

Baptismal records also reflect social and cultural trends as they affect church attendance; these remained fairly steady from the 1920s² through to the 1970s but then fell sharply, and with increasing speed (figure 1.3). There were 76.9% fewer baptisms in the P.C.I. in 2010 compared to 1960, and 52.6% fewer in the 20 years from 1990 to 2010. These figures are even more striking than the decline in the overall Presbyterian population, which is becoming much older on average. Communicant numbers did not begin to fall as sharply until the late 1980s (figure 1.4). The full patterns of decline will be examined in more detail in chapter 4, most particularly in relation to the decline in numbers of children and young people who will be demonstrated to be the most significant numerical loss to the denomination. Falkiner's survey in the 1960s expressed various reasons for non-attendance at Sunday school and Bible class, including 'apathy, indifference and absence of any real religious convictions on the part of the parents' (1966, p.29). The significance of this statement will become clear after considering the theological foundations of Irish Presbyterianism, which provide an essential context for understanding Falkiner's insight.

² In terms of general Northern Ireland demographic change, population decreased between 1921 and 1937 from 1,380,451 to 1,279,753 and children under 1 fell from 25,074 to 23,142, of whom 6,200 were born to families adhering to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. These statistics do not compare to exactly the same time period, but when the Northern Ireland Presbyteries only are considered, baptisms fell from 6,979 in 1920 to 5,666 in 1940, a drop of 18.8%, compared to a drop in children under 1 of 7.7% which suggests even by the Second World War "Presbyterians" were decreasing numbers at the bottom end. By 1960 the number of baptisms had rallied to 7,022 (although this figure includes numbers from the south of Ireland Presbyteries, this proportion was already decreasing to less than 5% of the total), compared to 31,989 births in Northern Ireland.

Theological Foundations

It is significant that one of the most challenging aspects of researching the development of youth and children's ministry practice in P.C.I. is the great dearth of relevant information dating from before the first Presbyterian Youth Committee was formed in 1945. Since then there continues to be a lack of comment and in-depth information and few of the major histories of the denomination make more than passing reference to children and young people, including even the Presbyterian hallowed Sunday school. Those sources which do have helpful content must be carefully examined to extract anything of substance as there has been little or no critical analysis of the place and significance of youth and children's work within the denomination.

Although the average Presbyterian at any stage over the past 250 years might insist upon the importance of children in the church, the standing of youth and children's ministry within the formal structures and literature suggests that in reality it has not been seen as a priority. How is it that there is such a stated emphasis on the importance of children and young people which is yet combined with a lack of regular attention given to their intentional faith development? This is another reason to examine the historical theological context from which P.C.I. emerged.

The covenantal perspective

'Reformed theology is covenant theology'.
(Hesselink, 'On Being Reformed' cited by Horton, 2006)

It is important to consider Presbyterianism as having a reformed covenant theology, a view of how Scripture is structured and how it expresses God's dealing with his creatures throughout history. Covenant theology is found within reformed or Calvinist theology (Baddock 2001) upon which Presbyterianism is founded. The defining doctrinal document, the Westminster Confession of Faith, describes the theological understanding of how God engages with the world only by means of covenant: 'The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him, as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant' (Westminster Confession of Faith 7.1). So, for reformed Presbyterians the question of covenant is an essential element of the doctrine of God (Baddock 2001, p.73).

This emphasis on covenant theology within the Reformed tradition has grown in importance over time. 'The role of the covenants in scripture has not always held the position of

prominence in critical biblical scholarship that it does at the present. Only recently has the pivotal position of the covenant concept been recognized in the widest possible circles. Yet from the perspective of the historical and theological succession of John Calvin and the reformers, 'covenant theology' has been central in thought and practice.' (Robertson 1977, p.65). This theology was fundamental to the Scottish Presbyterianism from which the Presbyterian Church emerged; 'The old theology of Scotland might be emphatically described as a *covenant theology*' (Walker 1888, p.3). There was a significant influence from Scottish covenant theologians such as David Dickson and Samuel Rutherford (Golding 2004, p.54) who influenced the foundations of what became Irish Presbyterianism. During the formative years of Presbyterianism in Ulster, (1770 – 1840), 'the language and concept of covenant was a prominent theme in the administration of the rites of passage, the Lord's supper, psalm singing, and the attachment of sections of the laity to Presbyterian ecclesiology' (Holmes 2006, p.306).

In agreeing with Hesselink's assertion at the start of this section, Horton warns against reducing Reformed or Calvinist theology, upon which P.C.I. is solidly built, to being synonymous with the T.U.L.I.P. 'five points' of Calvinism³, or even with the doctrine of predestination; 'the actual confessions, catechisms, and standard doctrinal work of the Reformed tradition all testify to a far richer, deeper, and all-embracing faith in the God of the covenant. *Reformed* theology is synonymous with *covenant* theology' (Horton 2006, p.11). In fact, Horton describes covenant as an 'architectural structure' which holds together biblical faith and practice (2006, p.13).

'The Greatest Fight in the World' summarises Charles Spurgeon's 1891 address at his Pastors College Conference, and was published just before his death. In it he said, 'I love men [sic] who love the covenant of grace, and base their divinity upon it: the doctrine of the covenants is the key of theology'. (Johnston 2009). Golding asserts that there is 'no more important doctrine for faith and life that the church needs to be clear on (or re-educated in) than that of the covenant. It is of particular importance to this discussion in that it defines the understanding of the sacraments from the reformed Presbyterian perspective, and the place of the young within the church' (2004, p.186).

³ Calvin is often known for his 5 points of grace known by the mnemonic T.U.L.I.P. which stands for Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints (McGrath 1999)

Golding cites J.I. Packer's view that the church must see 'how big and significant a thing the covenantal category is in both biblical teaching and in real life' (2004, p.186). Thus, from an original Presbyterian perspective, biblical doctrine, ethics and practical theology or discipleship all are about understanding and expressing God's covenantal relationships with His people. Golding (2004, p.187) examines Packer's insistence that a covenantal framework is required to understand the Gospel, the Word of God and the reality of God and argues for the following three key principles of covenant theology.

Firstly the covenant is seen to be unified across Old and New Testaments in their understanding of divine statement 'I will be your God and you will be my people'. Calvin insisted on this continuity across Old and New Testaments, explaining that the difference is primarily one of administration (McGrath 2011, p.88). 'This covenant of the Old Testament, sealed by circumcision, and that of the New Testament, sealed by baptism, are one and the same' (Schenck 2003, p.7). Secondly is the sense of solidarity in the covenant, as essentially a corporate concept. Golding points out the continuity of the covenant across generations; 'the Church does not abide because she baptises or works regeneration by baptism; rather because God establishes his covenant from generation to generation, therefore the church remains and baptises' (Golding 2004, p.192). Finally, he emphasises the perpetual nature of a covenant established as an everlasting one across eternity (Golding 2004, p.192).

This covenant theology has been very significant in Ulster Presbyterianism; 'Reformed principles that were articulated by covenant theology in general but not confined to it, such as an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God, original sin, the supreme deity of Christ, justification by faith alone, and of the regeneration and sanctification of the Holy Spirit' (Holmes 2006, p.307).

There is, however, concern amongst some that the emphasis on covenant theology has decreased and even become neglected. Golding quotes two significant theologians who express such concerns, firstly David L. Neilands 'The Church is no longer covenant conscious. We have failed to grasp the importance of covenant theology, covenant thinking, and covenant living'. Secondly he cites J. I. Packer 'In modern Christendom, covenant theology has been unjustly forgotten' (Golding 2004, p.185). Leith (1990) argues that the crisis of the church is theological and comes from practices which develop from theology; so to assess if the influence of this important theological perspective is still felt within P.C.I. the practical theological outworking must be assessed.

The community of faith: an intergenerational family environment

‘The church in its organized life lives from the commitment of faith. The renewal of the church depends on the integrity of the faith and on the practices by which the worshipping, believing community lives’ (Leith 1990, p.11).

One of the core concepts of covenantal theology is that God repeatedly renews his covenant promises with his people, despite their repeated unfaithfulness. The covenant is refreshed with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah and finally the new covenant in Christ. On each occasion, the collective nature of those with whom God is renewing the covenant is emphasised as seen in a number of Scriptural references, such as the ones below:

Genesis 17:7-8 ‘I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to *be your God* and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will *be their God*.’

Leviticus 26:12 ‘I will walk among you and *be your God*, and you will be my people’.

Revelation 21:3 ‘And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and *be their God*.’

(New International Version, 1978, emphasis mine)

The very nature of the covenant between God and his people is relational, that is a bond of love is kept sure by God’s unwavering faithfulness, to all generations i.e. ‘Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures’ (Psalm 119:90, New International Version, 1978). One of the ways this works itself out is that God’s promises are to his people and these promises are generational, that is to their descendants also.⁴

The importance of the intergenerational nature of the covenant continues in the New Testament. Paul frequently referred to the ‘Family of believers’ (Galatians 6:10) and the relationships between generations. Frazee argues that the Apostle Paul’s ‘emphasis on familial and familial-like relationships in the body of Christ is evident when he describes the respect and honour he expects each believer to give across generational lines’ (2008, p.2).⁵ ‘The renewal of the church begins on the human level with an act of remembrance. The Christian church has bequeathed to us the Bible, theology, worship, and the fellowship of the church. These have been handed on from generation to generation by the witnesses, by believing, worshipping people’ (Leith 1990, p.11)

⁴ See also Genesis 9:9ff; Genesis 17:7; Deuteronomy 29:14ff; Psalm 89:3ff.

⁵ See also 1 Timothy 5:1-2; Titus 2:1-15; 1 Timothy 4 and 1 Peter 5.

Possibly the most significant piece of Scripture which relates to intergenerational faith is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.' (New International Version, 1978)

This passage outlines the clear duties of adults in the covenant faith community, starting with parents, to be active participants in the spiritual formation of children, and to do this as part of everyday life ongoing community. The Westminster Confession (Johnston 2009) teaches this generational element of the covenant as follows:

Q. 62. What is the visible church?

A. The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children.

Leith (1993, p.18) also highlights the importance of faith community: 'Christian theology at its best always grows out of worship, practice and reflection of the Christian community'. Indeed, it is the requirement to worship which links the church family to the home environment of the child; 'joint worship, both as part of a local congregation and as a family at home, is a vital part of knitting a family together as brothers and sisters in Christ' (Köstenberger 2004, p.126). 'So believers' children are drawn into the orbit of God's covenantal promises because of their parents' faith in Jesus. Christians' children are not outsiders, but insiders, part of the covenant community' (Crooks 2001, p.133). The spirit of this is also captured well in Psalm 78 'We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.' (New International Version 1978).

Leith also points out that 'the traditioning of the faith is generational' (1993, p.35), noting how genealogies are used in Scripture to demonstrate God's Lordship over history. He acknowledges the work of sociologists like Wuthnow in highlighting the role of generations in influencing the church. Leith, however, outlines the factors in modern society which mitigate against the survival of tradition: contemporary society lives in the present moment, there is a dominance of secularity, pluralism, mobility and the influence of mass media (Leith 1990, p.44)

The sacraments: the sign and seal of the covenant

The importance of the intergenerational covenant community of believers has been demonstrated, and sacramental practice is a fundamental expression of faith within this.

Question 162: What is a sacrament?

Answer: A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his church, to signify, seal, and exhibit unto those that are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of his mediation; to strengthen and increase their faith, and all other graces; to oblige them to obedience; to testify and cherish their love and communion one with another; and to distinguish them from those that are without. (Westminster Larger Catechism, McLeod 2010).

Within the reformed tradition, the only two sacraments are recognised as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, helping define the reformed faith's understanding of effectual salvation through the holy ordinances instituted by Christ. Luther believed that the sacraments were fundamentally to reassure believers of their membership of the body of Christ and the kingdom of God' (McGrath 2006, p.428) and the Westminster Confession of Faith states 'Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace,(Chapter 27, MacPherson 2009)

In reformed thinking, sacraments and the preaching of scripture are closely associated; Calvin believed that without the sacraments, there could be no Christian church, as the two marks of a true church were the preaching of the word of the God and the faithful administration of the sacraments' (McGrath 1999, p.190, 2011, p.426). Sacraments are meant to be visible, tangible signs of grace which act as channels of grace (McGrath, 1999, p.169). 'The ceremonies of the sacraments belong to this world of covenant-making. Every time we witness a baptism or receive Communion, God is shaking hands on the deal he has made with us. To be sure, there are two parties - we are shaking hand as well - but in this covenant his are the hands that enfold ours. While we must believe the promises given in the covenant, God is the guarantor of the treaty' (Horton 2006, p.137). As this illustrates, it is important to understand the concept of grace within the reformed understanding of these covenants, in that God is seen to accommodate himself to human limitations through instituting the covenant, the 'divine accommodation to human weakness' (McGrath 1999, p.171). ' 'The sacraments represent the promises of God, mediated through objects of the everyday world' (McGrath 2006, p.427).

The sacraments of Baptism and Communion are 'signs and seals' which ratify or confirm the covenant and which cannot be removed from it. They are also given as tangible pictures of God's salvation which are intended to strengthen the faith of Christians (Crooks 2001, pp158-9). Like Calvin, the Scottish Presbyterians historically also insisted that Sacraments should

never be administered without preaching of the Word and that they were not merely signs but that efficacious grace was always connected to receiving them.

Question 34: How was the covenant of grace administered under the Old Testament?

Answer: The covenant of grace was administered under the Old Testament, by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the Passover, and other types and ordinances, which did all fore-signify Christ then to come, and were for that time sufficient to build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they then had full remission of sin, and eternal salvation.

Question 35: How is the covenant of grace administered under the New Testament?

Answer: Under the New Testament, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the same covenant of grace was and still is to be administered in the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; in which grace and salvation are held forth in more fullness, evidence, and efficacy, to all nations. (Westminster Larger Catechism, McLeod 2010)

As these sections of the Westminster Confession and Larger Catechism describe, it is also important to understand that the sacraments of baptism and communion are the expression of the new covenant as circumcision and Passover were signs of the old covenant. Reformed theologians see Christ as the fulfilment of God's covenant promises and the signs and seals as being intended to strengthen faith and give a tangible, experiential picture of God's salvation (Crooks 2001, p.158). Calvin believed that 'humanity needs reassurance and reminding of the promises of God. The sacraments provide such reassurance, not because of any shortcoming in God's goodness, but because of human weakness and frailty. Sacraments are thus intended to confirm to a doubting humanity the trustworthiness of the promises of a gracious God' (McGrath 2011, p.481). For young people, experiencing faith lived out in community encourages them to follow that same faith; 'It is seeing God's covenantal love and faithfulness that is intended to drive the recipients to worship and thankfulness, and to consider what response his covenant should produce in their lives' (Golding 2004, p.186).

Holmes (2006) records how 19th Century Presbyterians would not accept the neglect of family worship and parent's religious instruction of their children, as the family was seen as the 'nursery of the church' (285). He traces how, from the late 18th century, there were culturally significant and distinctive differences between Presbyterians and other denominations and much of this centred around their understanding of baptism and communion; 'Rites of passage and the way they were administered ultimately embodied in the distinctiveness of the Presbyterian community...Their understanding of this sacrament was inseparable from their understanding of the church and the covenant relationship between the community of believers and God' (2006, pp.200-1). For Presbyterians, church membership was achieved through baptism and confirmed by the individual's personal recognition of his or her baptismal

covenant when taking communion; 'It was impossible for human authorities to determine the secret state of a communicant's soul' (Holmes 2006, p.197).

Baptism: joining the Presbyterian family

Question 165: What is baptism?

Answer: Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into himself, of remission of sins by his blood, and regeneration by his Spirit; of adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's.

Question 166: Unto whom is baptism to be administered?

Answer: Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized. (Westminster Larger Catechism, McLeod 2010)

Under the old covenant, a child became a member of the community of faith, the visible church, upon the administering of the mark of circumcision (Genesis 17:14); for the Reformed believer, baptism replaces circumcision as the mark of those who are members of the visible church (Crooks 2001, p.162). Baptism is a seal of the covenant, a reminder 'that God has promised to actively work in our lives to make all His covenant promises real in our experience' (Crooks 2001, p.163).

Crooks emphasises the connection between baptism in the reformed tradition and the Covenant of Grace, especially God's covenant with Abraham. '(God) promises the same salvation to us as He promised to Abraham, and on the same basis – faith in Jesus...the sign of the covenant is to be administered to the same categories of people as it was in Abraham's time – the believer and the believer's children' (Crooks 2001, p.165). P.C.I., as a reformed covenantal church, practices the baptism of the infant children of believers; many reformers argued that those parents answered vows 'on behalf of' their child, but Calvin argued that they answered 'for the sake of' the child (Barclay 1966, p.41). Just as under circumcision 'infant males were shown to be members of the covenant community. In a similar manner, baptism was the mark that an infant belonged to the church, the community of the new covenant' (McGrath 1999, p.193). Notably, baptism therefore also is a public demonstration of allegiance to God, Calvin believing it to be the sign of initiation into the church (McGrath 1999, p.192). 'Baptism was clearly important to the life of communities. At one level, it was the sign of being a member of the local community of believers, a part of the visible church. At another

level it could also have signified membership of the invisible church if God in his grace had predestined the individual to become a true believer' (Holmes 2006, p. 210). Members of congregations must also take vows at a service of baptism, reminding them of their responsibility as church members, specifically towards the child who was being baptised and his or her spiritual well-being.

Schenck insists that the Westminster Confession, the rule of reformed theology, makes no distinction between professing adult Christians and the infant children of believers when it discusses baptism (Schenck 2003, p.49). The relationship between the infant and his or her family will be examined more specifically later.

From the earliest days of the church, superstitious beliefs in relation to baptism were common with respect to the child's spiritual and physical development and thus even unbelieving parents would seek baptism. Practice of private baptism, despite being contrary to the principles of Covenant theology, was sanctioned by the Presbyterian Code in 1825 after it had become almost universal practice (Holmes 2006, p.203). However Seceders insisted on public baptism in late 1700s and such practices were specifically condemned as part of the institution of P.C.I. in 1840. These reforms were not only to try to dispel errant teaching such as baptismal regeneration, but to positively promote the values of covenant theology for, in the words of one commentator Denham, in both sacraments 'the recipients are declared to be peculiar people, separate from the world, and under covenant engagement to be the Lord's' (Holmes 2006, p.210). It is clear that the orthodoxy of the reformed understanding of sacrament was vital to the very existence; 'at stake for reformers was their identity as Presbyterians and Protestants' (Holmes 2006, p.210).

Barclay argues that baptism is more than formal admission to the church, a sign and seal of the covenant of grace (Barclay 1966, p.41). Baptism, despite being a once in a lifetime sacrament, is intended to be something which goes with the individual through his or her life as a spur for faith and this suggests that young people may find a clear understanding of their baptism to be helpful to them in their spiritual growth.

'To the believer, baptism was a sign and seal of Christ and his benefits. It also provided both comfort and a motive for repentance and change during a believer's lifetime...and individuals renewed their baptismal covenants at communion' (Holmes 2006, p.202). This observation by Holmes indicates how both sacraments of baptism and communion have been designed to be significant helps to a believer's discipleship and therefore ought to be of great use to encouraging young people in the faith.

Communion: participating fully with the Presbyterian family

Communion is also a significant part of the Presbyterian identity and tradition, not just in affirming church membership, but originally in ensuring the orthodoxy of that membership. As the church developed in Ireland, the practice emerged of giving communicants a lead communion token once they had passed a system of examination and discipline administered by Kirk Sessions; sufficient knowledge of the reformed faith and satisfactory moral character were essential to receive the token (Holmes 2006, p.28). Ministers or elders examined the religious knowledge of first time communicants in the weeks before communion, this knowledge having been imparted, amongst other means, by catechizing children in the principles of the tradition of Presbyterianism. Holmes cites the example from the late 18th Century of James Hunter, the minister of Coleraine, who attributed the success of his congregation to 'the particular care exercised toward young persons admitted to sealing ordinances, by meeting with them 5 or 6 different days and instructing them in doctrinal and experimental religion' (in Holmes 2006, p.166).

Calvin saw Communion as a reassurance for believers, when Christ's promises are confirmed through symbols of his flesh and blood which bring eternal life (McGrath 1999, p.193). Crooks points out that Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is first of all a means of looking back with gratitude to the Cross and remembering what Jesus did there, cementing the New Covenant (2001, p.170). He also highlights it as a spiritual way for a Christian to renew their commitment to Christ; 'sacrament is not a biblical word but comes from the Latin 'sacramentum' being an oath of loyalty which a Roman soldier swore to his commanding officer' (2001, p.171). In addition, Communion is a means of fellowship with other Christians in an act of unity.

Question 168: What is the Lord's supper?

Answer: The Lord's supper is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine according to the appointment of Jesus Christ, his death is showed forth; and they that worthily communicate feed upon his body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; have their union and communion with him confirmed; testify and renew their thankfulness, and engagement to God, and their mutual love and fellowship each with the other, as members of the same mystical body (Westminster Larger Catechism, McLeod 2010).

During the 20th Century there were questions about the age at which children should be admitted to communion and concerns about the age at which many of them then stopped attending. The 1951 Youth Committee reported concern about the numbers of young people becoming communicant members especially in Belfast where rates were 'alarmingly low'

(P.C.I. 1951b, p. 129). This trend may relate to the level of significance the sacrament has for the participating young people. Falkiner's 1966 survey highlighted a trend which is still reported today⁶ that 'in some rural and semi-rural Parishes the young people proceed almost automatically through these stages of graduation and a high proportion of them become communicants' (1966, p.12).

By the 1980s, the church was asking more questions about the participation of children in communion and at the 1985 General Assembly, the Church Education Committee recommended no change in traditional practice but highlighted that 'The traditional position of Reformed Churches is that Candidates should be admitted to the Lord's Table by Kirk Sessions only after they have received instruction and themselves made profession of faith'. Raising the view that children are unable to have the necessary maturity and self-understanding, they concluded that 'It is not appropriate that children should receive the symbols of the Sacrament without understanding the Word. There is a danger that we return to the mediaeval idea, rejected by the Reformers, that a sacrament is effective simply because it is performed and received' (P.C.I. 1985b, p.219). In 1986 the Doctrine Committee stated 'there would seem to be no doctrinal reason for excluding children, who come in faith, from an ordinance similar to or subordinate to the Word of the Gospel' (P.C.I. 1986b, p.201). Some of the recommendations in response to the Report included the early instruction of children about the meaning and significance of the Sacraments, the opportunity for children and young people to be present when possible, with their presence recognised in some way, and flexibility about the age at which children and young people are admitted to the Lord's Table (P.C.I. 1986b, p.202).

This issue continues to generate discussion and in their 2009 report the Doctrine Committee emphasised differentiating the presence and participation of children in communion services. They made no attempt to define a child according to age, but highlighted the need for them to make their own 'credible profession of faith in late childhood, adolescence or early adulthood' (P.C.I. 2009a, p.40) and to be able to 'discern the body' (i.e. they should be able to understand that there is something 'set apart' in the nature of the bread used in communion, and they should be able to 'examine themselves'. The Committee clearly stated that 'it wishes not only to underline the importance of children's presence the Lord's Supper, but also to propose that their presence should be acknowledged in some significant way' (P.C.I. 2009b, pp.40-41). Furthermore, the committee said it was vitally important to take hold of the opportunities to

⁶ In 2012, the Presbyterian Presbytery of Derry and Donegal held special conferences to consider the specific issue of the number of young people who take first communion under a sense of family expectation, but do not stay with the church past their participation in this first communion.

teach and nurture children which came with their increased participation in services. They encouraged churches to employ 'greater and more creative effort' to have children present at communion, and consider 'how children may participate in the Communion service as a whole' (P.C.I. 2009b, p.41). Interestingly, the Committee also suggested preparing a short liturgy for families to use at Sunday lunch as a follow up to a Communion Service or to have a meal together as a congregation afterwards.

Passing on the faith

Reference has been made to the importance of ensuring doctrinal orthodoxy of church members and in bringing up children in the faith in an intentional way. Historically this has been achieved in P.C.I. in two key ways, one more formal and one less so, but both intertwining as part of the wider family experience of faith.

Catechism and Confession: teaching the heart of being Presbyterian

The Reformers saw Scripture as the sole authority in faith and life, but established subordinate standards to help interpret the Bible, namely the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms. The Catechism has been an instrument of teaching doctrine to Presbyterians for centuries, originally seen during the reformation and first instituted formally by Luther in the 1520s in response to the shock he experienced in seeing the levels of Biblical illiteracy among worshippers; 'It's question-and-answer format was ideally suited to learning by rote, and the work was widely adopted within the schools of the region' (McGrath 1999, p.239). Calvin produced his first Catechism in 1542 following the same format and these set the standard for subsequent catechisms (McGrath 1999, p.241). 'Catechising provided the framework in which to assess and understand the doctrinal distinctiveness of the community' (Holmes 2006, p.271).

The Shorter Catechism and Westminster Confession were used in this way in the 18th and 19th centuries but some complained that the Shorter Catechism was beyond the understanding of young children; 'Evangelicals wished also to improve the effectiveness of catechising by working with smaller groups and placing less reliance upon rote learning' (Holmes 2006, p.259). Reform of the Presbyterian Catechism was ongoing through the 20th Century; following a call for 'a revised version of the Catechism itself in less archaic language' (P.C.I. 1953a, p.141) in 1958 a new Primary Catechism for 5-8 year olds was introduced, followed by a Junior Catechism for 8-11 year olds. The Shorter Catechism could then be taught to age 11 and over,

with thought given to the order and manner in which this should be done to make as accessible as possible, (P.C.I. 1958a, p.161).

Support for the use of catechism decreased during the second half of the century so in 1990 a new Catechism with accompanying worksheets to assist teaching was produced and piloted in Sunday schools (P.C.I. 1990a, p.270); it was generally well received by Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries who responded 'that this material would increase the opportunities for learning and understanding of the basic Christian doctrines contained within the Catechism' (P.C.I. 1992a, p.271). It was published in 1993 as a glossy booklet entitled 'Signposts'.

However, it appears that, rather than reforming or replacing the catechetical method, it has simply declined and no alternative method of teaching doctrine has been developed. The 2004 survey of Presbyterian Sunday schools found that only 55% of churches who responded taught the Catechism and only a very small number used Signposts; informal evidence suggests that it has declined sharply since then, even among churches which would be characterised as more reformed evangelical. This raises important questions about how children and young people are brought to an understanding of the key doctrines and faith in which they are being raised.

With the importance of the authority of Scripture in the reformed tradition, not only were catechisms seen as vital to teaching and understanding, but official Confessions of Faith were written as approved interpretations of the Bible, forming a third level of authority, after Scripture and Creeds such as the Apostle's Creed (McGrath 1999, p.242). It is therefore important to consider how this theological approach is being maintained in the current church.

The Presbyterian Family at home: worship, baptism and the changing Church

The distinctive theology of Presbyterianism has been demonstrated to be very important to the history and culture of the denomination and the impact of doctrine on practice. Key doctrines have been examined, especially in relation to their importance to children and young people in Irish Presbyterianism. However, no aspect of the practical outworking of covenant theology is more important than that of family.

As in the Old Covenant, the New Covenant in Christ puts the family as the key mechanism of faith-building. 'Having this confidence in God's faithfulness to his covenant promises is the most important single thing we can do for the salvation of our children' (Smallman 2006, p. 15). The Apostle Paul exhorts fathers to raise their children in the 'training and instruction of the Lord' (Ephesians 6:4). This too is intrinsically connected to the covenant of God which had

been repeatedly renewed from the time of Moses, where parents have a particular role in passing on the faith.

'In the future, when your son asks you, 'What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?' tell him: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand...The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today'(Deuteronomy 6:20-25 New International Version).

This perspective was very intentionally promoted by the Church of Scotland in the 17th Century, when they adopted a Directory for Family Worship in 1647. 'The head of the family was to ensure that all members of the household observed family worship, which consisted of prayer, praise, catechizing and Bible reading. *Family worship was deemed an indispensable component of the religious instruction and development of the young and, therefore, the church as a whole*' (Holmes 2006, 285 emphasis mine).

Holmes describes how, from the late 18th century, orthodoxy was carefully tested and elders questioned communicants and parents; 'Did they have a family worship, did they and their families keep the Sabbath, did they practice private prayer and teach their children to pray?' (Holmes 2000, p.65). For Presbyterians, infant baptism is administered only to the children of believing parents, when their child is deemed to be engaged to be wholly and exclusively God's and the parents enter into a covenant where they are depending wholly on will and grace of God. Parents once took vows to bring children up in the knowledge and doctrine of the church in the presence of sponsors, but now do so before the whole congregation, who also promise to order their congregational life to support the child in coming to a point of personal profession of faith.

Crooks acknowledges the difficulties that someone from the perspective of today's culture might have real difficulty understanding 'the idea that, on the basis of his faith, the believer's children are also the focus of God's promises' but compares it to the citizenship a child gains through their parents nationality; 'believers' children are drawn into the orbit of God's covenantal promises because of their parents' faith in Jesus'. Christians' children are not outsiders, but insiders, part of the covenant community' (Crooks 2001, p.133).

Holmes points out that 'When well done, family devotions were an indispensable component of Presbyterian self-understanding and religious education.' (Holmes 2006, p.286) and there have been several moves to support parents in this important role through the history of the P.C.I. Some 18th Century ministers produced prayers and meditations to be used by heads of families (Holmes 2006, p.286) but even then and into the 19th Century, ministers grew

frustrated at some parent's ineffectiveness in this role. Although this view of the family as the primary context for the passing on of faith to children continued, the concerns that this was not happening effectively also grew in the 20th century. The General Assembly of 1944 urged ministers and Kirk Sessions 'to impress upon parents the sanctity of baptismal vows and their personal responsibility for the Christian upbringing of their children' (P.C.I. 1944b, p.53). In 1947 (P.C.I. 1947a, p.104) it was first recommended that, in addition to the usual annual Children's Day, a Parents' Service be instituted and in 1948 the reason for this was explained 'to bring before them the need for home training, and the urgency of co-operation between the home and the Sabbath School' (P.C.I. 1948,89). 'In view of this the Committee feels that a great effort ought to be made to restore the Sacrament of the Public Baptism of Infants to its rightful place in Public Worship' (P.C.I. 1947b, p.103).

Summary

It has been described how P.C.I. is founded on a reformed, covenant theology which emphasises passing on the faith to children through sacrament, intergenerational community and the Christian home. The next chapter will consider the development of youth and children's ministry in the denomination and how it has responded to the challenges of a changing world, whilst moving away from many of these foundational principles.

Chapter 2 - The history of modern youth ministry practice in PCI

Introduction

The previous chapter outlines the establishment of P.C.I. and the original context for raising children and young people in the faith within the Christian home and the church family. The past century has seen very significant changes in the practice of nurturing faith in the young, and the establishment of various forms of organised activities for children and young people. The starting point of these changes may be traced back to a movement which had very different intentions and it is important to examine the origins of the education system in Northern Ireland and the establishment of Sunday schools as the backdrop to subsequent organised youth work in the church.

Educational developments

Schools

The development of the education system in the 19th and 20th centuries has had important influence on the subsequent church youth work. Indeed, the origins of schooling and its impact on society in Northern Ireland cannot be seen without understanding the role of the churches, not least in establishing 'Sabbath Schools'. The Church realised that Bible reading required education, however John Knox's idea of a school in every parish could not translate to Ulster where the confessional state meant control by the Anglican Church of Ireland (Holmes 2006, p.266).

During the late 18th century several Presbyterian congregations established schools, mostly in Belfast, Londonderry and Dublin; funding for more came at the start of the next century from evangelical foundations such as the London Hibernian Society and the Kildare Place Society. This education was mainly in "hedge schools", run in many cases by Presbyterian licentiates or ministers who taught basic reading and writing for a small fee, using various materials 'from popular chivalric romances to the Bible and Shorter Catechism' (Holmes 2006, p.266). Thus the teaching of Christian and of Presbyterian doctrine was tied in with education from the origins of education in Northern Ireland. In 1824 the Shorter Catechism was taught in local Ballymoney schools (Holmes 2006) and the earliest Cullybackey Sabbath schools were held in day schools (Megaw 2004). The 1831 Ordnance Survey Memoir declared the positive impact of Sunday schools which 'led to a change in the morals of the people and in their observance of the Sabbath' (cited in Megaw 2004, p.141).

However, concern emerged about the proselytising of children in denominationally based schools and with the establishment of the National Education system in 1831, the National Board promoted non-sectarian education and excluded Bible teaching during school hours (Holmes 2006, p.268). A state of conflict between the Synod of Ulster and the governmental National Board emerged in 1832, when the authorities were opposed by a majority of Presbyterians who believed it was displacing the Bible as the basis of education. Some ministers continued to deal with the Board and even take charge of National schools. Ulster Synod schools were established by subscriptions from the Presbyterian laity and had the Bible and Westminster Catechism as the set text books. The divisions were deep and Presbyterian dissention eventually led in 1840 to Government concession to Synod demands; Presbyterians were again allowed to equip and run their own schools making use of government funds. Thus a denominationally based education system (including Irish language schools), which the National Board had wanted to avoid, was firmly rooted (Holmes 2006, p.269).

Sunday schools were initially set up to provide education for child labourers who could not attend week day schools; 'The establishment of Sunday schools was not a naked exhibition of social control. The atmosphere of self-improvement affected all levels and sections of society' (Holmes 2006, p.270). Barclay points out that by 1861 only 41% of the population over 5 could read and write and that in 1862 there were 228,428 in Sunday schools but only 103,566 in day schools. However, by the turn of the century, the Sunday school movement was to change in its form from a means of educating the poor to a means of educating the children of believers and it is from the development of Sunday schools that the origins of organised youth work in the church will be traced.

Sabbath School development

In 1785, only 5 years after Robert Raikes started the Sunday school movement in England, similar schools were established in Ulster, specifically in Bangor, Dundonald, Crawfordsburn, Doagh and Ballyclare (Holmes 2006, p.270). The movement took off in 1809 with the formation of the non-sectarian Hibernian Sunday School Society for Ireland as an umbrella body for the eighty Sunday schools on the island (Barclay 1962, p.11). 'The existence of a keen group of benefactors and the desire for education by ordinary Presbyterians meant that the number of Sunday schools soon increased dramatically in Ulster from 256 in 1816 to 2,010 in 1841, almost two thirds of the total number in the whole of Ireland' (Holmes 2006, p.271).

The Synod of Ulster encouraged all congregations to establish Sunday schools 'as nurseries for the young, in imparting Scriptural knowledge, training to habits of docility, respect for the

Sabbath and religious ordinances and the attention to all the relative duties of life' (Minutes of the General Synod of Ulster, 1934, cited in Holmes 2006, p.271).

'The impact of Sunday schools in terms of those attending is striking, but how far they succeeded in winning new generations to church life is difficult to determine. It is clear from numerous examples that they did encourage better observance of the Sabbath and a deep desire for religious knowledge and debate' (Holmes 2006, p.272).

The Presbyterian Sabbath School Society began in 1862 as a result of a conflict with the Sunday School Society (Barclay 1961, p.17) and a formidable and revered institution was born which reported to the General Assembly long before the institution of the Youth Committee.

The origins of children's ministry in the Presbyterian denomination show evidence of those who had clear insight into the nature of the ministry and the children within it. In 1912, the Jubilee of the Sabbath School Society for Ireland, Rev J. A. Hutton (Glasgow) addressed the meeting 'There is a real sense in which we can impose nothing upon the minds of children. We must educe it by the assistance of God's spirit and out of the susceptibilities of their own nature' (Sabbath School Society for Ireland 1912, p.66). Later at the same event, Rev Carey Bonner, expressed a similar sentiment: 'We have to learn that our task is not to impose a mass of religious information and doctrine on the child. Rather it is to nurture a soul, to develop a character, to perfect a personality. The Sunday school teacher should be an artist of mind and spirit. He is more than a starter of truth. He is a starter of soul processes, an awakener' (Sabbath School Society for Ireland 1912, pp.106-7).

The Youth Committee first recommended the introduction in 1951 of junior Bible classes for ages 14-17 where they did not already exist, with the promise of suitable material (P.C.I. 1951a, p.129) as much as anything to address the 'senior scholar problem' where older young people were drifting. The Committee provided a 'Transition Course of Bible Study' for use in these classes (P.C.I. 1952a, p.132) with yearlong titles such as 'God the Father', 'Jesus Christ the Son' and 'God the Holy Spirit'. The courses provided for use in congregations appear to be evangelical and strongly Bible-based and the strategic significance of the Sunday school was a focus of the 1950s. The Committee reported that 'while we cannot be too grateful for the high standard of religious instruction provided in day schools, it is still the Sabbath School, properly understood and conducted, that our young Presbyterians are being prepared with the knowledge, and guided towards the personal faith in God, which equip them to enter upon reasonable membership of the Church' (P.C.I. 1954a p.149). Two years later the Committee stated that 'A main function of the Sabbath School is to provide a training ground for Church Membership. Through corporate praise and prayer, the teaching of the Scriptures, and the

giving of their offerings, the children are instructed in the meaning of reverence and worship, and prepared to take their places in the full membership of the Church' (P.C.I. 1956a p.150). By the end of the decade Rev Alec Watson began his Convenor's report: 'The Sunday School acts as a seismograph, indicating the line along which future ruptures in Church life may lie. Unlike earthquakes, these can be prevented, if appropriate action is taken' (P.C.I. 1960a p.139).

The Youth Committee produced a new Curriculum for p1 to form 4, in 1969 justifying the provision of a separate P.C.I. course on the basis that 'it is the responsibility of our Church to see that our own young people are nurtured in the faith that our Church holds and proclaims' (P.C.I. 1970a p.203). One aspect of this course was that, through the provision of 'take home' materials, the church sought to engage parents in a co-operative partnership with Sunday school teachers. Although there appears to have been a thoughtful, somewhat strategic and effective Christian education within P.C.I., there is little evidence that this developed within a conscious mindset of covenant theology so a gradual and unintended impact can be traced in the form of the declining influence of the Christian home as the primary place to pass on faith.

In 1948 the Youth Committee expressed concern that although Sunday schools were ideally seen as supplementary to 'home training', 'it is to be feared that if it were not for the religious instruction given in the Sunday school, many children would have no knowledge of the Scriptures and no interest in sacred things' and 'the majority of parents look upon it as substitute' (P.C.I. 1948a p.87).

In his 1959 report as convenor of the Sabbath School sub-committee, Rev D. H. A. Watson highlighted the relationship between parents and Sunday schools, promoting 'discovering ways and means of working out together the vows made in the face of the congregation when presenting their children for Baptism. A Parents' Guide is put forward as a possible method of teaching parents how they can contribute positively to the work of the Sunday school which at best is only supplementary to home training and worship' (P.C.I. 1959, p.180).

In the foreword to John Barclay's history of the Sabbath School Society in 1961, Right Rev. W.A.A. Parke wrote 'One of the tendencies of modern parents is to delegate responsibility in the matter of the religious training of their children more and more to the teacher. We may deplore this tendency, but how important it is then that our teachers should be well informed and have a zeal for God according to knowledge. The Sabbath School Society has sought to take care of that' (Barclay 1961, p.7).

References to the role and responsibilities of parents in their children's spiritual education diminished in the 1970s and 1980s, and it appears that there was a growing acceptance that the Sunday school had become the primary means of teaching faith and doctrine to children and young people. These issues continue to be a concern; the Church Education Committee produced a booklet entitled 'Time for the Family' in 1994, highlighting parental responsibility in Christian Education (P.C.I. 1994a p.245) and the current Board of Youth and Children's Ministry is considering the best ways to support Christian parents. It may be that a pivotal change had occurred during the 20th century regarding the emphasis of the context of raising children and young people in the faith and the loss of some of the Presbyterian origins for this practice. There is no doubt that many effective organisations have been established over the course of the past century and more, but their relationships with the theological origins of the denomination and the role of families and wider church must be understood.

Organised Youth and Children's ministry

First youth organisations

The first youth organisation to exist in P.C.I. was the Central Presbyterian Association which ran from 1882 – 1932. 'Throughout the winter months, religious and literary meetings were held, and subjects were discussed which had a practical bearing on daily life. Prominence was given to principles calculated to give mental and moral stimulus to young men and to brave them up for life's battles' (Johnston 1932, p.13). This place of fellowship in a Christian environment is in some way a forerunner to the modern youth organisation, along with another organisation, The Young People's Guild. This was formed by the 1891 General Assembly for young people who had reached Sunday school leaving age and were viewed to be in danger of leaving church connections behind (Bonar 2004, p.231). Guilds were not proscriptive, but affiliated to a central Guild Board who would help in the formation of Guild Bible classes for those aged 14 and over followed if there was no such organisation in that congregation. The Guild programme included debates, discussions, temperance meetings, missionary meetings sports and choir and it encouraged members to find a role in the wider church work and McCoubrey highlighted a spirituality which ran through all the activities of the week: 'I believe the only way in which I can sum up all that the activities and fellowship of a Guild mean is to define it in the term, Christian Friendship' (1949, p.308). The Guild Board was replaced by the Youth Committee in 1946 and the identity of the organisation faded, but it may have been formative to the shape of informal youth work in the church for the future.

Formal organisations

The first Boy's Brigade (B.B.) company in Ireland was established in 1888 in the Anglican St Mary Magdalene Parish Church (1st Belfast) but was to become an important part of youth work within the Presbyterian Church to this day; boys in the B.B. are obliged to attend Church, Sunday school and Bible class. The Girls' Brigade (G.B.) was founded in Sandymount Presbyterian Church, Dublin in 1893 and the similar Girls' Life Brigade founded in London in 1902, coming to Ireland soon after. In 1964 the Girls' Brigade and Girls' Life Brigade amalgamated and in 1967 the G.B. formed four sections: Spiritual, Physical, Educational and Service (P.C.I. 1967a p.145). The organisation continued to expand, with the establishment of 11 new Presbyterian companies in 1975 (P.C.I. 1975, p.213). G.B. members also are obliged to attend Church and Sunday school or Bible class.

The Christian Endeavour (C.E.) movement came from the United States in the late 19th Century which put 'great stress on devotional study and on personal allegiance with the Lord Jesus Christ' (P.C.I. 1950a p.137). Margaret Magill's Sunday school class in Agnes Street Presbyterian Church thrived on 'her system of enlisting the aid of the girls themselves in running things' and she established the first C.E. in Ireland in 1889 (Cooney 1977, p.12). The idea exploded such that by March 1896 there were over 100 societies in Ireland and over 10,000 members by the end of the century (Cooney 1977). Although the organisation declined steadily though the latter part of the last century, it has a very significant place in the history of P.C.I. and still exists in several churches as the model of training young people in leadership by involving each of them has strong validity today.

'It has always insisted that the loyalty of the society as well as that of the individual member to Christ must be expressed through the church. It has always avoided being a substitute for the Church, but has rather been its auxiliary. It has been a training agency, to make young Christians more effective in the expression of their faith. The motto of the organisation expresses its sense of priorities: "For Christ and the Church"' (Cooney 1977, p.8). It is interesting to read this aspiration as it appears that the development of youth ministry since this point has been characterised, at least to some extent, but a detachment from the main congregation.

The 20th century saw the founding of a number of new organisations aimed at meeting the needs of young people and some of these were closely connected with the Presbyterian Church. The Girls Auxiliary (G.A.) was founded in 1911 for girls over 14 years of age, 'designed to be a youth auxiliary to the Women's Missionary Association... (aiming) to unite the girls of the Presbyterian Church in personal allegiance to Jesus Christ and in the service of His

Kingdom' (Falkiner, 1966, p.33). Mills points out the missionary emphasis of the G.A. as well as its focus on 'helping its members to be more committed Christians, more widely informed and better auxiliaries in congregational life and work' (Mills 1990, p.3). In the late 1940s, reports of G.A. focussed on works of social service and members who had gone on to church work such as becoming 'Church Sisters'; this could be argued to be a specifically discipleship organisation with a missionary focus and it grew to a membership of 2,900 in 1964 (Falkiner, 1966, p.33). However, as the decade moved on it became increasingly viewed as old-fashioned and was disbanded in 1974⁹.

The Boys Auxiliary (B.A.), founded in 1922, also focussed on providing 'social and educational activities for young people and to support Presbyterian missions' (Bonar 2004, p.239). The B.A. had a strong link with the Guysmere Centre in Castlerock, having officially purchased the site in 1929 and opened a rebuilt Guysmere in 1932 which was the site of an annual camp, the first B.A. camp taking place in 1926. An article in the Presbyterian Herald in May 1944 stated that there were 1,300 members, 200 of which were fighting in the war. The chief aim of the B.A. was reported in 1950 to be 'to help others and to enlist its members to the full work of the Church – the bringing in of the Kingdom of God' (P.C.I. 1950a, p.137). The ethos from the start was of loyalty to the Church in a worldwide sense; it was not seen as competition for uniformed or other organisations and there was no standard form of meeting, with physical, mental and spiritual aspects to activities (Mills 1990, p.8). The B.A. was finally terminated as an organisation in 1970, but it has a strong tradition, whose influence is still identifiable in the church.

Scouts and Guides have existed in Presbyterian churches for decades and have been continually reviewed and rebranded in recognition of changing culture, but still seem to serve a need for an enthusiastic, if much decreased number.

Informal youth work

In 1950 the Youth Committee reported that 'Youth work in connection with our Church still depends mainly upon the older and well-tried organisations' but, in addition to the more formal organisations 'experimental methods are being tried in various quarters to capture and hold the interest of young people who may have little interest in the Church. From all this it is obvious that a great deal of devoted interest is being given to the cause of leading young people to the fuller Christian life' (P.C.I. 1950a, pp.136-7). By the following year the Youth Committee reported growing numbers of gender-mixed Youth Fellowships (or Guilds) and a

⁹ A small number of independent groups still exist.

successful conference of youth fellowship representatives was held in autumn 1950 which became an annual event. In 1956 it was reported that 56 congregations had Youth Fellowships 'mixed groups unite senior young people in study and active work for the Church' (P.C.I. 1956, p.151)

The 1967 Youth Committee report stated that the 'field of informal youth work is always fluid and often excitingly experimental. In an attempt to reach young people 'coffee-bar' type clubs have been initiated by a number of congregations...by their very nature, youth clubs and fellowships often arise spontaneously and may have slender links with each other...it must be emphasised that no common pattern can or should be expected in their activity' (P.C.I. 1967, p.146).

In 1968 a survey estimated that 6,500 young people were involved in informal youth work in PCI at that time (P.C.I. 1969, p.153) a substantial number considering there were 11,299 young people in Presbyterian Bible classes in 1970 (P.C.I. 1971, p.242). The report expressed concern that too many of the clubs were content with simple recreational programme and not taking advantage of the opportunity for 'social education, Christian education, moral education and education in community responsibility' as a complement to uniformed organisations (P.C.I. 1969a, p.153).

By the time the Presbyterian Youth Board came into existence in 1972, youth fellowships were very much seen as 'the main forum for learning, exchange of ideas and debate of Christian principles, implications, events and structures' (P.C.I. 1973a, p.204). Another significant declaration to notice around this time was the central commitment to 'Open Youth Work', i.e. 'our concern is for all young people and, indeed, perhaps especially for those who are beyond the reach of the institutional Church and of our fellow organisations and clubs' (P.C.I. 1973a, p.205). This is perhaps the most concrete recognition so far that young people could no longer be assumed to be connected to a local church and that the church needed to think strategically about reaching and keeping their young people through means appropriate to the day. The Youth Board first produced material for Youth Fellowships in 1974 in response to 'the growing demand for the more casual educational programmes suitable for youth club, youth fellowship and coffee-bar situations' (P.C.I. 1974a, p.214). This was another landmark in a journey where the responsibility for the spiritual development of young people had moved away from families and the wider church community and towards organisation, with increasing demand for support from the central church.

Central organisation of youth provision

Although the Presbyterian Church in Ireland came into existence in 1840, despite being a denomination with committees at its core with of a growing number of emerging organisations to meet young people's needs, it was not considered necessary for over 100 years to have a full Assembly committee to oversee these needs. Up to this point there had been reports to the Education Board by smaller ad hoc committees overseeing Youth Welfare, Boys' Auxiliary, Girls' Auxiliary, Sabbath School and Young People's Guild and it was from these regular reports that there came a proposal to the 1943 Assembly that a full Assembly Committee may be necessary to consider youth work in the church.

The 1944 Generally Assembly gave general approval to formation of an Assembly Youth Committee 'to coordinate the Youth Work of the church without interfering with the autonomy of the organisations and to initiate new work as may appear desirable' (P.C.I., 1944b p.53). Interestingly, the motivation for such a move was not specifically better co-ordination and promotion of the work, but included some strategic measures such as leadership training, the needs of the 18-30 age group, linking young people to the wider church and the possibility of an outreach centre in Belfast, (P.C.I. 1943b, p.53); these issues continue to be central strategic targets for the current Board of Youth and Children's Ministry.

The remit of the original committee was to 'take general superintendence of all the Youth Work of the Church' (P.C.I. 1945a, p.95) and it was immediately apparent that this was a broad and ambitious task. In addition to this large agenda, the new Committee was appointed to oversee not only the work which had reported to the Education Board, but also Youth Welfare and the Sabbath School Committee, suggesting a vision for a coordinated and integrated ministry to children and young people which was supported by the institution of an Annual Collection for Youth Work in the Church.

The first major report of the new Committee in 1947 showed its immediate priorities, highlighting the work of the organisations (B.A., G.A., B.B., C.E., Boy Scouts and Girl Guides but not G.B.) and of the 24 clubs and 2000 members of the Churches' Youth Welfare Council, which aimed 'to reach young people between the ages of 14 and 20 who are out of touch with the church, and with the ordinary youth organisations, and to give them a chance to develop in body, mind and spirit' (P.C.I. 1947, p.102).

Following research into youth ministry practices across the world, the Youth Committee proposed a new structure of 'Presbyterian Youth' in 1969, designed as a movement of various organisations associated with the Presbyterian Church to foster identity and purpose. It was

concerned for 'effectiveness at the level of the local congregation and Presbytery, rather than to emphasise a national superstructure' (P.C.I. 1969a, p.157) and to facilitate young people's involvement at every level. The Youth Secretary indicated the value of a spiritual community, stating that youth ministry should never be 'a nervous effort to keep young people in or win them for the Church. A style of life which is inspired by the Gospel and a genuine care for a new generation is all that is required. The message of good news is strong enough to excite, engage and commit those of all ages' (P.C.I. 1969, p.159).

A major step in the development of youth ministry in the denomination was when its own Board was constituted in 1972, both 'to act in the name and in accordance with the instructions of the Assembly in matters affecting Youth in Ireland' and 'generally to develop the Church's witness to, and work for Youth and the service they in turn may render to the Church and community' (P.C.I. 1972a, p.208). The new Youth Board first met October 1972 when the also newly constituted Education Board became responsible for Christian Education in Sunday schools and Bible classes (P.C.I. 1972a, p.207), though there seems to be little explanation in reports as to why this division was made. However, these two areas of work were reunited in 2004 when the Board of Youth and Children's Ministry was constituted.

Changing priorities

Development of centrally organised staff

Although there had been a series of Sunday School Organisers, from the start of the 20th Century, there was no youth staff member until quite some time later. To back up the ambitious vision, the General Assembly of 1945 formally agreed to the appointment of a full-time Youth Secretary, although it was over twenty years before someone was to fill such a position. In 1963 the appointment of a Youth Secretary was again proposed for the 'integration and development of the youth work of the Church...the fostering of links between young people and the life and work of the Church in the local congregation or more widely with the aim that more and more the youth of this Church enter into the full responsibilities of Church membership and Christian witness' (P.C.I. 1963a, p.135). The post was finally approved in October 1964 and Rev Gordon Gray was appointed as the denomination's first Youth Secretary in 1966. Eddie Witherspoon took up this role (then referred to as Youth Officer) in 1974 and Roz Stirling was the third to assume the position in 1992.¹⁰ Following the formation of the integrated Board of Youth and Children's Ministry, the then Sunday School Organiser,

¹⁰ Roz Stirling took early retirement from the post in September 2012.

Ian McKee, became Deputy Director to Director of Youth and Children's Ministry, Roz Stirling, as a sign of the unity of the two areas of work.

It was not until 1990s that there began a series of additional appointments which indicated the priorities of the church. These included field officers for the Republic of Ireland, staff to oversee the work of the residential Centres and Year Team and other central appointments: Youth Development Officer (1997), Children's Development Officer (2005), and Young Adult's Development Officer (2010), with also Training Officer and Director of Programmes.

Training

The importance of training and equipping leaders was an early priority for the newly formed Youth Committee in the 1940s; 'Our teachers are voluntary workers engaged in the greatest service. Surely all Kirk Sessions ought to endeavour to equip them fully for this work. Money spent in this way is a sound investment for the future of the Church' (P.C.I. 1948a, p.88).

Training has since been a constant priority with courses held for leaders and teachers; following the establishment of the Youth Board in the 1970s, the amount and breadth of leadership training grew with residential courses, day seminars and leaders completing Stage 1 Training Course provided by the Churches' Youth Welfare Council. The Board continued to develop specialised courses through the 1980s and 1990s and launched the 'Basic Leadership Training Course' in 1995 (P.C.I. 1995a, p.226). The first Youth and Children's Ministry Courses were held in 1999 in partnership with Union Theological College and these courses have grown into a very significant resource to youth and children's leaders, seeking to provide training with theological and theoretical depth. This partnership with Union College also led to modules being taught as part of their B.Th. course, starting in 2004.

A major training landmark was the first 'Training Trevor' conference held in June of 1994 when almost one thousand leaders attended a day of key note addresses and seminars from top trainers; this was the first event of its type on the Island and set the foundation for many similar events in the following years. The emphasis has more recently changed to facilitating training at a more local level, with the development of Road Trip from 2006, where a number of seminars were delivered at various venues around the island, and the appointment of Approved Trainers in 2011 to deliver local training on behalf of the Board.

Events and gatherings

From the early years of the Youth Committee, there have been a great variety of centrally organised gatherings which have become more strategic and impacting on the denomination. The first Youth Assembly of the Presbyterian Church was held in 1955 when 2000 members of Sunday schools and organisations met in the Assembly Hall. This was followed in 1956 - 1960 by similar gatherings of young people with a speaker and worship, rather than any form of debate or discussion. 1972 saw the first youth delegates to the General Assembly and the first Youth Assembly was held in 1985 (P.C.I. 1984a, p.258). 'Youth Voice', was attended by 126 young people under 26 representing 42 churches and 14 Presbyteries (P.C.I. 1985a, p.246); a number of resolutions came forward to the General Assembly which focussed on the participation of young people in church life and worship, and moral issues such as sexual relationships, unemployment and drugs.

The second 'Youth Voice' was held in 1986 with 175 delegates and the themes of 'Worship' and 'The abuse of the body', bringing resolutions to the next General Assembly. However, this forum for youth representation was not continued due to lack of commitment from key individuals to listening to young people and having their views represented. It was over 20 years before youth involvement in decision making was pursued again, this time by the Business Board of the Presbyterian Church who realised that participation was becoming increasingly vital for the future of the church and proposed in 2008 that a Youth Assembly be piloted the following year. This grew into 'SPUD', a youth participation movement which continues to grow and develop significantly in the denomination.

The origins of denominational youth events are very different from today's activities; in the 1935 Pageant of Presbyterianism, young people acted out a history of Presbyterianism over three nights in the Assembly Hall in Belfast, in 'a spirit of pride in, and loyalty to, our Church' (P.C.I. 1935). Such events continued over the following years, culminating in 1948 in a number of locations, including in Belfast in front of 5000 people (P.C.I. 1948a, p.86).

It is not clear when the very first Youth Night took place, but it has been a regular feature of the end of Assembly week in most Presbyterian's living memories. These events have evolved from their very formal origins to the current modern youth event, but have always been fairly standard occasions. However, the Youth Board has been known for the establishment of groundbreaking and strategic events, including 'Youthreach 1980', a year of church-wide evangelism aimed at 15 year olds and over. An associated manual for study and discussion and a year of local evangelism led to the first 'Youthreach' festival in Coleraine in 1981, with 500 resident delegates and 1200 in attendance overall on one day (P.C.I. 1982a, p.213).

Youthreach was repeated in 1983 'with an emphasis on worship, teaching, training and recreation' (P.C.I. 1983, p.200). In 1997 Youthreach was held for the 16th and final time, a very significant event for the church, but setting the stage for new and innovative events. 'Route 66' a Bible conference for those aged over 16 and the 'MAD weekend' a residential weekend for those aged 11 and over to attend with their leaders both commenced in 1999 and proved to continue the vein of providing significant events at a central level for the resourcing of the local church.

Over the years, the central church has run three centres in Castlerock, Rostrevor and Lucan which were each a significant sites of ministry through the 1990s both in terms of summer work and use by various groups during the year. However, due to the financial pressures of maintaining residential centres in the current age, Guysmere in Castlerock is the only current centre and is currently closed, pending a General Assembly review. These centres have been part of a series of summer camps run over many years.

In 1975 an outreach team of young people was brought to the annual Lammas Fair in Ballycastle, where they were trained in evangelism and given the opportunity to make contact with people in that context through coffee-bars, films visitation and open air services. The number of teams continued to grow since then to 17 teams in 2012, forming a very significant part of the denominations' life and witness.

In 1992 the first 'One Year Team' was instituted as a team of young people available to serve for a few weeks at a time in different congregations as part of what was then almost unknown but is now commonly known as a 'gap year'. This concept continued and grew in different guises to the present day, with many young people serving in volunteer years and internships, several of whom have gone on to ordained or other full-time ministry in the church.

The organisation of overseas teams for young people has a long tradition within P.C.I.; in the mid 1950s a team of young people went to U.S.A. to represent the church and several trips of young adults went on European trips in the 1960s and 1970s, but these appear to have been little more than holidays rather than mission trips¹¹. During the 1980s and 1990s a number of teams were sent overseas to work with Presbyterian missionaries of other mission agencies, and this has become a regular feature of the Board's work to this day. During the past decade, with the increased ease of travel, this has become increasingly common practice in local congregations also.

¹¹ Evidence comes from conversations with the late Rev Dr Ronnie Craig and the late Rev Andy Todd who were both heavily involved in the Youth Committee.

Central themes and strategic developments

The Youth Board resolved in 1979 to 're-examine the role and goals of Church youth work' (P.C.I. 1980a, p.201); it asked the General Assembly to request each congregation to 'undertake an enquiry into the nature, scope and effectiveness of its youth programme as a means of leading young people into an intelligent and personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour' (P.C.I. 1979a, p.208). This was a clear statement of the need for strategic ministry, and the reported that 'the 80's could be a most crucial period in the history of our Church' (P.C.I. 1980a, p.200)¹². In 1993 the Youth Board reviewed their work stating that 'as a Board we see ourselves as facilitators of congregations in their youth work' (P.C.I. 1993a, p.266). The new strategic plan and restructuring of committees came into effect the following year with this mission statement:

'The Youth Board exists to educate the Church about the needs of young people and to facilitate local congregations in the work of evangelism, training and nurture of young people' (P.C.I. 1995a, p.220).

In 2012 the Board was ready to launch a 'Frameworks' document which detailed the ethos and approach to youth and children's ministry in the denomination and this is expected to be a highly significant and influential document.

Paid church workers

The first reported youth workers in congregations were in 1969, when a part-time and a full-time worker both received significant grants (P.C.I. 1969a, p.153). In 1975, the Youth Board resolved to the General Assembly 'that the Church give consideration to the employment of full-time and part-time youth workers' (P.C.I. 1975a, p.215) and in 1979 the Training Committee urged that 'there must be an increase in the number of full-time youth worker posts' (P.C.I. 1979a, p.206), which at that time could still attract 100% grants from Education and Library Boards. As the number of church based full-time youth workers grew during the 1990s, the Youth Board held regular meeting days and an annual retreat for their support and development from 1997, which continues to be an important feature of the Board's work.

Social context and culture

Part of the implications of strategic thinking is evidence-based practice, not least in careful consideration of the context of practice. Rev Alec Watson in his 1959 report on the Sabbath

¹² In fact, as chapter 4 will describe, this decade saw by far the biggest decline in numbers attending P.C.I. Sunday schools and Bible classes.

School Committee asked a question which showed great foresight; 'There is no evidence of work among Teds. Perhaps we have *no* Presbyterian Teddy Boys or have we *no* place for them?' (P.C.I. 1959a, p.181). The importance of thinking about youth culture and the social context in which young people live has been a significant one since then, including the place of disabled, socially or academically advantaged young people. The 1970 Youth Committee Report began to ask questions about how the work of the church with young people had to change to adapt to cultural changes. 'Suddenly the Church has a new type of member. He (sic) is only eighteen, but he is an adult. He has a vote, can marry as and when he pleases, buy a house and make a will. Moreover he has demonstrated his new-found power to change the face of society. He knows his place; and knows that it is equal with older Church members who have formerly expected deference on account of seniority.' (P.C.I. 1970a, p.202).

While acknowledging the gender biased language, this at least demonstrates a growing awareness of the central denomination's role in raising awareness of the importance of the cultural context for ministry. Northern Ireland has one major unique cultural issue, but little mention was made of the sectarian strife in Northern Ireland until the report of the Youth Committee in 1972 referenced the impact of the violence on the young, stating that 'no country in Western Europe has as daunting a "youth problem" to face as we have (P.C.I. 1972a, p.198). The impact of 'the Troubles' was noted 2 years later; 'Six years of civil strife have produced a generation of young people who are highly critical of previously accepted institutions' (P.C.I. 1974a, p.216). A more striking comment was made in the resolutions of the Youth Board in 1975;

'That the Church seek the forgiveness of God for not appreciating the urgent situation in our society, where young people are being exploited by paramilitary organisations, advertisers, promoters of vice and other negative influences; that the Church now take seriously the need for a more dynamic and effective outreach into the Youth scene, to promote the growth of the Christian faith and values in our society, by involving more lay people in the total sphere of service to youth' (P.C.I. 1975a, p.215).

A 1989 a report was published on 'Inter-denominational Youth Activity' was sent to Presbyteries for discussion and the issue common to nearly all submissions was 'the need to teach our young people more thoroughly the substance of the Reformed Faith as expounded in our Subordinate Standards' (P.C.I. 1990a, p.252), though there was significant disagreement to what else needed to happen. A Reconciliation Officer was appointed in 1990 to help resource the church's young people and leaders to address division and reconciliation in Ireland and in 1998 the Reconciliation Working Group established a strategic plan called 'Preparing Youth for Peace' which developed into a very significant programme of the same

name, receiving funding from outside sources including the Peace fund and enabling the appointment of a Programme Officer.

Key strategic issues which the Board has sought to emphasise to the Church from the 1990s include the key relational context of youth ministry and the importance of integrating of youth and children's ministry within the intergenerational family of the church. The Church Education Committee in 1981 had earlier asked the question 'To what extent do we, in our attitudes to and treatment of our children help them to be active participating partners in the whole life and witness of the Church?' (P.C.I. 1981a, p.191). By the time the Board of Youth and Children's Ministry was established in 2004, the need for an integrated approach to ministry to those aged 0-25 in the wider Church was well established and provides the platform for the current work. The role of the SPUD Youth Assembly has been critical in this, as they seek to encourage the church to engage more directly with young people in order to help them find ways to participate in the life and decision-making of their congregations.

Conclusion: development and loss

This comprehensive history details the impact of the growth and development of ministry to and with children and young people in P.C.I., within its own unique context. It would have been interesting to consider in more detail if space allowed, issues such as the impact of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, the unfolding situation since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 1998, the implications of living in a society which continues to be divided, and even the regional, demographic and socio-economic patterns within the church.

It can be concluded that there have been huge steps forward in addressing the needs of young people in the church and many examples of creative work. However, what is also clear is not only the numerical decline of the church and increasing secularisation of the world around it, but questions about what has been lost on the journey. For a church with a clear and proud heritage, some of the core elements have declined and even been lost. Whereas some would not mourn the demise of the use of catechism with children and young people, there appears to have been no replacement means of instructing young people in the doctrines and beliefs of the church. There are also questions about the form and structure of the activities carried out with young people and whether they have become often marginalised and detached from the covenant community in which they were once central.

In particular, the move away from the family as the central place of raising children and young people in the faith and of the intergeneration church family as the vital wider context is highly significant, especially given the outlined core theological values. Regardless of the quality and effectiveness of any organised programme, the wider context in which young people find themselves is more significant. Where they invest themselves, where their long term spiritual identity is established and the framework in which their spiritual values are absorbed are more important long-term than any particular methodology.

This study will address these issues whilst also considering the various factors which may impact their adherence or disappearance. Firstly, however, it is necessary to give detailed consideration to the particular needs of young adults in the current society.

Chapter 3: Developmental changes in emerging adults

In pursuit of the question of how to keep 18-25 year olds close to the church, chapters 1 and 2 have outlined some of the contextual background of Northern Ireland, including the history of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, its theological underpinning and its ministry with young people in particular, acknowledging the importance of covenantal theology.

This chapter will begin to consider what must be understood about 18 to 25 year olds in order to effectively engage with them and encourage their positive spiritual development. There will be consideration of developmental issues in the transition to adulthood, examination of theories of faith development and a reflection of how the interaction between these two fields might inform the broader research question.

Developmental transition to adulthood

This section will consider the various approaches to what is traditionally referred to as adolescent development, identifying both the development itself and the changing influences on it, along with explanations for the process. The purpose is to consider what is known about the process of becoming a mature adult and its significance for young people's connection to church.

Traditional theories

It is important to consider the historical context of adolescent development theories as this helps to clarify the origins of current understandings. G. Stanley Hall is seen by many as the founder of the academic study of adolescence with his volumes on 'Adolescence' (1904). However many have more recently come to see this work as originating a misguided myth about the universality of adolescent 'storm and stress' which was later rejected by academics who came after him. To balance this, Arnett (2006b) points out that this was only part of a much larger work, much of which is now still accepted.

Following the work of psychoanalyst Erik Erikson 'it is often asserted that adolescence is a "critical" phase or period in the life course when identity has to be established in order for young people to become ready to assume adult sexuality and other adult responsibilities' (Rattansi and Phoenix 1997, p.125). Erikson's approach consists of a series of age-related stages and he has had a very significant impact on the academic study of adolescence, as his view that identity is the central developmental issue of adolescence is very influential (1950,

1968). Identity became increasingly seen as a marker of healthy psychological adjustment and was linked to self-esteem. Subsequently James Marcia (1980) expanded on Erikson's work and argued for the significance of identity development, working towards the achievement of an individual identity through four stages, independent of external factors.

Keniston identified 'youth' as the period between adolescence and young adulthood but his theory was based on research into college protesters which now lacks credibility; nevertheless the term has now become synonymous with any period from age 10 to 30 (Goossens 2006a). Sociological approaches to youth in the 1970s and 1980s tended to focus on subcultures (often research subjects being male and working class) and trivialising the youth issue to perpetuate the idea of 'storm and stress' paying insufficient attention to specific issues of identities of young people (Rattansi and Phoenix 1997).

Goossens describes how theories on adolescent development tend to centre on questions of whether adolescence is a distinct developmental phase and whether it is characterised by increased stress and turmoil (2006b). He suggests that most theories are 'organismic' in that the individual is conceived as active in their own development through distinct steps or stages for which there is an end goal (for Freud, 'genital sexuality' and for Piaget 'formal operations'). Goossens describes how these theories are typically organised into 4 broad categories: biological (e.g. Hall's 'genetic psychology'), psychoanalytic (most famously Freud), socio-cultural (including social learning theory) and cognitive (including Piaget's stages of cognitive development and Elkind's theories on the adolescent's sense of self and others); these theories all seek to identify or explain the nature and form of how a person changes in the period between childhood and adulthood (2006b). There are many other theorists of adolescent development, but no one accepted understanding of how young people develop into adults.

Changes and barriers

The societal context in which young people are now transitioning to adulthood has changed considerably in recent decades and continues to be a changing environment. This period is referred to as 'late modernity' or 'post-modernity', and is characterised by market-oriented policies and consumption-based lifestyles which are replacing community-oriented policies and production-based lifestyles. This has an impact on that journey to adulthood which will be explored in this chapter.

Rattansi and Phoenix (1997) believe current culture impacts in the following ways:

1. The ongoing transition from industrial to post-industrial period has seen the rise of service and financial sectors and the emergence of new production methods which create new hierarchies in labour and class structure.
2. Complexity and flux partly due to technological innovations and transformed class structures and new forms of globalization which not only creates the 'disembedding' of identities but the invention and re-invention of others.
3. The emergence of feminist, gay and lesbian politics and the rise of 'new social movements' with various single issue and identity politics (environmental, race, etc).

The literature highlights a postmodern culture which is fundamentally shaping both social relationships and individual identity (Côté 2000). In considering the process of becoming an adult in today's society, the very understanding of what an adult is and how one reaches this status is under question in today's changing world.

Goossens defines adolescence as the transitional period between childhood and adulthood, boundaried by the onset of puberty and the transition to the adult status (2006a, p.1). However, within the context of today's changing society, the timing and nature of this transition has changed significantly. It is interesting to note that even in the 1960s Erikson began to identify how industrialized societies could be observed with a 'prolonged adolescence' 'during which the young adult through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society' (1968, p.150) and this theme has become extremely important. There is now general agreement that, during this postmodern era, transition to adulthood has extended and adulthood delayed (Hendry and Kloep 2007a; Côté and Bynner 2008; Arnett 2000, 2004; Furstenberg et al 2003; Goossens 2006a).

Arnett highlights various reasons for the delayed onset of adulthood in USA and other industrialised countries where the economic conditions have changed very significantly, (Arnett 2000, 2004; Riefman et al 2007). These include demographic changes such as the rising median age of marriage, rising age of first childbirth, (linked to the increased use of birth control), and other structural changes, notably more flexible educational opportunities.

Buhl and Lanz examine the concept of extended transition to adulthood across a number of European countries and, although they found some variety between these countries, there were the same general common experiences which confirms the experience of emerging adulthood, as identified by different generations (2007, p.441).

Scabini et al (2006) cite Cavalli and Galland who in 1993 referred to 'Senza fretta di crescere' (or 'no rush to grow up' i.e. the prolonged adolescence). The transition period is now no longer characterised by a short time with precise steps but a long time with many

'microtransitions' and is part of a double transition from adolescent to young adult to adult. Scabini et al also describe a preparatory phase where the conditions are created to promote the transition to adulthood.

Some are rather pessimistic about this life stage, such as Robbins and Wilner's 'Quarterlife Crisis: How to Get Your Head Round Life in Your Twenties' (2001) where they address those who are 'suffocated by choice, responsibility, and self-doubt'. However, others such as Arnett (2004, p.228) believe this concept is exaggerated and that there is no need to be excessively negative about those who are living through this life stage.

Some suggest that this changing transition is not neutral but, at least in some cases, is due to negative factors which militate against a free transition to adult status. Bynner (2005) identifies stratification and exclusion as two moderating factors on extended transition in Britain where, he argues, traditional social structures and institutions such as the impact of social class, gender, ethnicity and locality on patterns of education and marriage have retained more importance than in other European countries, and significantly more than in the United States (Bynner 2001). However, the data Bynner uses is now 20 years old and its continued accuracy must be questioned. Arnett explains, 'because for most people today the journey to adulthood is long and gradual, emerging adulthood tends to be experienced as a period of being in between adolescence and adulthood, on the way to adulthood but not there yet' (2004, p.216).

Consequences and implications

Perhaps the most significant implication of this generally accepted extended transition is the way in which it opens up opportunity for further role and identity exploration. Erikson (1950) first proposed a period of young adulthood lasting from late teens until around age 40 and later claimed 'identity is the central developmental issue of adolescence' and described how 'the young adult through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his (*sic*) society' (1968, p.150)

Keniston (1971) saw a period of continued role experimentation between adolescence and young adulthood, having become a time of frequent change and exploration. It is in this arena that Arnett presents his theory of 'emerging adulthood' as a developmental period distinct from adolescence and adulthood, 'Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work and worldviews' (2000, p.469).

There are practical consequences of the extended transition also; Evans and Furlong assert 'In today's society, the status of young adults has become more uncertain and they have become dependent upon state and parental support for longer periods than would have been the case a generation ago (1997, p.33). Arnett (2007b) argues that those who delay moving into adult roles will tend to embrace them fully and effectively when they feel ready to do so. However he recognises that there may be disadvantages to society if emerging adults have not just extended period of education and training but longer periods to engage in anti-social activities.

It is reasonable to conclude from what has been examined already that young people do not experience this stage of life as previous generations, much as early and mid-adolescents have a very different experience of life than that of their parents or previous generations. This difference is not least in the heterogeneity of those in their late teens and early to mid-twenties, thus the very attempt to describe them or assign characteristics, as Arnett does, is very difficult and somewhat controversial.

Bynner et al (1997) are keen to highlight from the sociological perspective what they see as the potential social implications of these trends.

'In the 21st Century the economic, social and political landscape is likely to continue to change at an ever-increasing rate. The transformation of the educational, work, family and social situations, in which young people achieve the transition to adulthood, will similarly accelerate. Young people are in competition with the previous generation for what the future will be like. The worldview they are developing now are key blueprints for the destiny of Europe as a whole.' (Bynner et al 1997, p.11).

There is a clear implication that the study of this age group is important regarding policies, not just for their benefit but for that of wider society. 'Policies towards young people are at last beginning to take on board the increasing complexity and difficulty of the transitions to adulthood that young people have to make' (Bynner 2001, p.18).

The practice implications are not just for social policy but attitudes and approach within specific social settings such as the church. The study of this age group and any understanding of how such young people engage in different social arenas must clearly acknowledge the changes which have been indicated. Before these are considered, however, there will be a closer examination of the theoretical frameworks which have emerged for understanding these young people.

New approaches and definitions

In response to this changing social and developmental situation, there have been various attempts to define and explain both the developmental period and the concept of transition to

adulthood itself. The subtle variety of approaches is illustrated by the terms used for the age period, which include 'late adolescence', 'young adulthood', 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett 2000), 'contestable adulthood' (Horowitz and Bromnick 2007), 'early adulthood' (Furstenberg et al 2003), 'arrested adulthood' (Côté 2000) and 'youth' (Bynner 2001)

In terms of the broader transitional period from childhood to adulthood, Psychologists generally refers to 'adolescence' and Sociologists to 'youth' but Rattansi and Phoenix suggest such divisions tend to miss their subjectivities, fluidity and context-dependency (1997). There are also difficulties using a term such as 'youth' which is often used as a term to combine many ages from childhood to young adulthood (Goossens 2006a).

Furstenberg et al propose that attainment of adulthood can be considered as either a cluster of transitions (focussing on school, work, leaving home, marriage, parenthood) or as the acquisition of the skills and attitudes necessary to perform adult roles; 'often by their own subjective assessments, many young people have not yet become fully adult because they are not ready or able to perform the full range of adult roles, and they have not forged a stable identity of who they are and where they fit into society' (2003, p.1). They therefore identify early adulthood as the defining period which is neither the extension of adolescence nor the avoidance of adult responsibilities but a time when young people ascertain their goals and objectives in life.

In keeping with this, Arnett (2004, 2007b) argues against the term *late adolescence* as he believes there are vast differences between this stage and the life experience of 'adolescent' 10-17 year olds; he similarly finds the term *young adult* inappropriate as it has been used to describe very diverse age groups and because they are, by his definition, not fully adult.

If there is difficulty agreeing about what to call the period of transition, there is also some disagreement about defining the concept of adulthood itself. Côté and Bynner concur with Arnett that the social markers of adulthood are no longer clearly defined and the social structures are eroded which decreases the meaning of the term 'adulthood' (Côté and Bynner 2008, p.261).

There is considerable discussion about what young people themselves view as adulthood and it is this very subjectivity which makes it hard to define. For many, the individual must work out what being an adult means to them: 'We are all in the vivid present, attempting to get somewhere, but to an elusive place. Adulthood does not exist, it has to be invented.' (Henderson et al 2007, p.20).

Henderson et al showed how young people felt adult in different ways and different contexts; 'thinking of themselves as adult was related to their feelings of competence, and the recognition that they received for that competence' (2007, p.25). They describe the different areas of life or 'fields' in which they develop adult identities: education; work; leisure and consumption; domestic (family, relationships, care), examining the significance of each field in the construction of identity.

Horowitz and Bromnick challenge assumptions about subjective markers to the transition to adulthood, arguing that adulthood itself is a contested concept and thus labelling the period as 'contested adulthood', which they define as 'the period between adolescence and incontrovertible adulthood, when claims to adult status become matters of contention and dispute' (2007, pp.212-3). In light of this, they argue that the markers of adulthood are 'multiple, contradictory and rhetorically deployable' (2007, p.213). From their study of young people at the top end of the age bracket, Molgat's qualitative examination of the attitudes of 25-29 year old Canadians (2007), found that they refer to adulthood in terms of both individual qualities and transitional markers.

Côté believes that to understand what people consider now to be an adult requires a contrast with what it meant to be an adult in the past and highlights the Latin roots of both the words 'adolescent' (*adolescere* 'to grow up or mature') and 'adult' (*adultus* 'grown') (2000, p.13). He explores how in preindustrial society an adult was simply a physical adult, someone who was no longer a child and notes that part of the change of how this has been understood has theological undertones. Côté believes that a move from a Calvinist understanding of salvation to an Arminian one which emphasised one's ability to work to gain salvation impacted the understanding of growing or maturing to become a 'psychological adult'; 'Consequently adulthood is now more a psychological state than a social status' (2000, pp.18 & 31).

Scabini et al point out that transition to adulthood is no longer marked by distinct leaps or rites of passage as it was in archaic or traditional societies, that is, it has become more of a path of transition (Scabini et al 2006, p.18). The manner in which the metaphors or descriptions used of transition from school to work have changed over time is also examined by Evans and Furlong (1997). They describe how it has moved from being referred to as a niche to be filled, to a bridge to cross, a route or pathway and then becoming seen more as a trajectory to now being described as navigation through difficult territory. Arnett concurs with this, arguing that young people 'reach adulthood not because of as single event but as a consequence of the gradual process of becoming self-sufficient and learning to stand alone. As they learn to take

responsibility for themselves, make independent decisions, and pay their own way through life, the feeling grows in them that they have become adults' (2004, p.227)

So it appears that descriptions of the transition to adulthood have changed mainly because the experience has become much less clearly defined, more difficult for individuals to negotiate and more diverse in the ways in which they do.

Within this discussion is the issue of whether the achievement of adult status is marked by discrete traditional markers or subjective individualistic feelings (Arnett 2000, 2004). Arnett examined the importance of subjective individualistic criteria as a marker for adult transition across age groups (from adolescence to midlife adults) and identified the following to be most important: accepting responsibility for one's actions, deciding one's beliefs and values, establishing an equal relationship with parents and becoming financially independent (2001). Traditional markers such as marriage and other biological transitions were marked lowest.

There is disagreement about defining these terms, stemming from a number of issues, much of which depends on the academic discipline of the theorist; therefore a multi-disciplinary approach to the subject is most helpful in that it takes what is most pertinent from various research rather than seeing these in opposition. There are questions about whether one considers subjective markers of attaining adult status as defined by the subjects themselves as more important than structural, objective ones relating to specific times and events.

Unique phase or transition?

One of the most contentious issues in the literature regarding the transition into adulthood is whether a distinct and unique phase of life has emerged. Arnett argues strongly that it is more than just a transition, as it is a time when such people are 'no longer adolescent but only partly adult' (2007b, p.70). His theory of 'emerging adulthood', (Arnett 2000) maintains that this is a distinct period demographically, subjectively (in that they do not see themselves as adolescents or completely as adults) and in terms of identity exploration; 'Emerging adulthood is a transitional period, yes – and so is every other period of life – but it is not merely a transition, and it should be studied as a separate period of life' (Arnett 2004, p.20).

Bynner (2001) emphasises the value of youth transitions research as it is a distinct stage in the life-course and its study leads to better understanding of the cultural and intergenerational components of adult identity formation. However, he and Côté stop short of agreeing with Arnett that it is a new and unique developmental phase, arguing that subjective differences in how young people themselves describe the period are explained by the induced social

conditions of the extended economic conditions, not something inherently developmental (Côté and Bynner 2008, p.252)

Thus Côté and Bynner reinterpret what Arnett calls 'self-focussed' and prone to 'instability' as simply the consequences of being 'on hold'; Arnett's 'feeling in-between' and 'a sense of possibilities' are, they argue, reactions to economic exclusion. Finally they critique Arnett's 'identity explorations' by stating that he has no viable theory of identity formation during the period and give a structural explanation; 'as a cohort, young people are denied viable sources of financial independence until their late twenties and social anomie has created widespread identity confusion as a 'new normal' state of affairs, which is mistaken by observers like Arnett to be a new developmental stage with its own epigenetic logic and function' (2008, p.264).

Scabini et al highlight the altering of traditional markers and increasing opportunity to make and revise choices, concluding that it is not a chronological expansion of adolescence or the first phase of adulthood but a unique bridge between the two. Furstenberg et al (2003) agree that there is good evidence for seeing this contested period as a new life phase similar to when adolescence was identified, pointing out that such individuals had no common term. 'None of the labels suggested by academics—not emerging adulthood, early adulthood, quasi-adulthood, or the transition to adulthood, and certainly not 'adulthood,' as some popular press journalists have recently proposed calling it—were used. This may be because if it exists in some implicit cultural level, the category itself does not have a name in the popular vernacular' (Furstenberg et al 2003, p.16). For many, they were not willing to accept having arrived at adulthood as it was seen as too negative, settled or dull.

Epstein (2011) has also engaged with Arnett to dispute that there is any new developmental stage, and in fact to argue that the creation of such labels and descriptors is itself detrimental to young people; he believes the creation of the phase of adolescence has thus artificially extended childhood and impeded young people from realising their potential. "What happens when you treat a whole segment of the population as if it is inferior and helpless? As blacks and women will tell you, many people in such a sub-population tend to believe what they're told and then to behave as expected...When we infantilize teens, we might create many of them in the image we have in mind, but that doesn't necessarily tell us about their potential" (Epstein 2011, p.161). However, the work of Arnett does not require that we accept a developmental phase as an inevitable and socially created obstruction to achieving adult maturity. Arnett's perspective can give a helpful framework in which to understand those aged 18-25 and to help identify how to engage them more effectively in church, creating a sense of hope rather than hopelessness.

Emerging adulthood

Arnett (2000) first formally proposed his theory of emerging adulthood as a new conception of a developmental period covering approximately 18-25. Presented as a distinct period demographically, subjectively and in terms of identity exploration, he argued this was only in cultures where young people are allowed a prolonged period of independent role exploration.

Arnett undertook considerable research with the age group, examining what they considered adulthood to be. One study presented findings of college students, only 20% of whom considered themselves adults, and over 70% of whom endorsed individualistic and intangible criteria as markers for the transition to adulthood (Arnett 1994).

Arnett (2000, 2004, 2006a) identifies 5 features of the period of emerging adulthood, namely that it is an age of *identity exploration*, of *instability*, of being *self-focussed*, of feeling *in-between*, and an age of *possibilities*. He believes that young people realise they have freedoms they will not have in their thirties and beyond and this phase of emerging adulthood mostly becomes one of change and identity exploration rather than during teenage adolescence; crucially, it is the time when 'they learn more about who they are and what they want out of life' (Arnett 2004, p.8).

Arnett also claims that this is an age of 'instability' when their life plans are potentially subject to many changes, especially as they clarify their identity and what they want to achieve in life; 'exploration and instability go hand in hand' (Arnett 2004, p.11). This instability is reflected in repeated geographical moves, changes in employment and other practical changes which accompany self exploration; 'What has changed since Erikson postulated the identity crisis is that it now takes place mainly in emerging adulthood, not adolescence...identity explorations become more prominent and serious in emerging adulthood' (Arnett 2007b, p.29).

In using the phrase 'self-focussed', Arnett is keen to point out that he is not being pejorative about emerging adults, but sees it as a normal, healthy and temporary stage of developing skills for living and better understand who they are and where they are going. Living in a period between being responsible to parents and teachers and a time when they will have a new set of social obligations and commitments, 'nobody can really tell them what they want but themselves' (Arnett 2004, p.13). Arnett also describes the age of feeling 'in between'; 'In between the restrictions of adolescence and the responsibilities of adulthood lie the explorations and instability of emerging adulthood' (2004, p.14). He attributes this mainly to the subjective criteria which emerging adults in his study use to define adulthood, namely

accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions and being financially independent, none of which commonly happens at once, but usually incrementally.

Finally Arnett identifies emerging adulthood as an age of possibilities, of 'high hopes and great expectations, in part because few of their dreams have been tested in the fires of real life' (2004, p.16). Thus, whatever negative connotations one may place on the understanding of adolescence, emerging adulthood can be a positive time where a community can walk with an individual as they discover their identity.

Greenberg shares the hopeful posture of 'Generation We', those born between 1978 and 2000, a generation with a very positive outlook, seeking to change their world through technological advance, business creativity, voluntary service, political involvement and social and environmental activism. 'They are looking for – and finding – ways to change the world, redefining the boundary lines between work, education, government, charity, and politics through social entrepreneurship and creative new forms of business' (Greenberg 2008, p.109).

In a follow up to his earlier work on the spiritual lives of teenagers in America, Christian Smith examined the religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults in 'Souls in Transition' (2009). He highlighted the importance of understanding this developmental phase if we are to understand issues of faith for those who are transitioning through it. 'Emerging adults' religious and spiritual assumptions, experiences, outlooks, beliefs, and practices do not exist in compartmentalized isolation from their larger cultural worldviews and lived experiences but are often related to and powerfully shaped by them' (2009, p.33). Smith identifies the frequent transitions, move from dependence to independence, almost overwhelming number of decisions and responsibilities and many other aspects of this developmental phase as being significant. Much of what Smith identifies as being essential to the emerging adult could be argued to be merely distinctive of the postmodern era. One phenomenon encountered by interviewers in the study was the inability of subjects to understand what was meant by objective moral truth. Another general response was to describe morality in terms of naturally following what one's own intuition or subjective feelings. Even if these are more a product of postmodernism than emerging adulthood, they are, significant in the understanding of the development and specifically faith development of this generation.

Some of Smith's other observations are close to Arnett's key characteristics of emerging adulthood: uncertainty about life's purpose, experiencing a fluid, experimental and relatively unbound phase of life; more tenuous relationships than previous generations had, yet spending much time on the creating and maintaining of personal relationships, (including through the use of technology and social networking); being consumer driven. The

implications of Smith's observations for religious and spiritual development among emerging adults are discussed later in this chapter.

Arnett (2007b) addresses some of what he sees as the myths about emerging adults which he believes need to be carefully refuted in the same way as the 'storm and stress' metaphor for adolescence was eventually dispelled. He says claims that they are 'suffering', miserable and wracked with anxiety and unhappiness, is an exaggerated notion and his evidence shows that most negotiate the challenges of the period well and optimistically.¹³

Arnett also considers suggestions that emerging adults are selfish (e.g. Putnam 2000 who highlights a decrease in civic engagement). 'Far from being selfish, emerging adults tend to be considerably less egocentric and better at seeing others' points of view than adolescents are (Arnett, 2004; Labouvie-Vief, 2006). Furthermore, they view becoming less self-oriented and more considerate of others as an essential part of becoming fully adult (Arnett, 2003). They reject selfishness in themselves and in others' (Arnett 2007b, p.27).

Finally Arnett critiques a theme often expressed in popular media¹⁴ that those in the emerging adult bracket are 'slackers', avoiding the responsibilities of adulthood in preference to enjoying the freedoms of leisure and lack of responsibility. Some of this is due to the speed of demographic change which means that older adults unfavourably compare unsettled emerging adults to their experience at the same age. Arnett (2007b) argues that this is not due to resistance to adult responsibility but changing economic and educational environment. Acknowledging that this is not the only explanation, he identifies ambivalence about adulthood due to mixed blessings of adult responsibility. Arnett insists, however, that this is generally not a child-like state of self-indulgent play, but a reasonable response to the impending realities of adult life.

Reifman et al (2007) tested Arnett's 5 features of emerging adulthood on a sample of 18-29 year olds; they largely support Arnett, adding a feature of 'other-focus', a counterpoint to self-focus.¹⁵

¹³ There is agreement from others on this point (Rattansi and Phoenix, 1997)

¹⁴ Time Magazine "They Just Won't Grow Up" (Jan 2005) or movie "Failure to Launch" portray this age bracket as being in a perpetual child-like state of play, refusing to take on adult responsibilities.

¹⁵ Those in the sample who were never-married were found to be higher in identity exploration but lower in other-focus than engaged/married group.

Arnett's theory is criticised by sociologists for being more descriptive than explanatory of the impact of conditions on this cohort of society; a systemic framework is necessary to achieve a fuller understanding (e.g. Hendry and Kloep, 2007a; Côté and Bynner 2008) and for its fundamentally psychological viewpoint; Bynner rejects Arnett's emphasis on changed timing of adult transition rather than identifying what in culture causes change (Bynner 2005; Côté and Bynner 2008). Bynner believes the features of emerging adulthood are much stronger amongst the socially advantaged, and that Arnett wrongly downplays the role of institutional and structural factors as merely influences and constraints, leading to a model which 'fails to recognize adequately that the huge diversity of individual experience is constrained by location in the social structure' (2005, p.378). Arnett (2006a) defends his theory pointing out that his research has shown the 5 features of the period in both North American and European contexts; he highlights the differing academic disciplines, as developmental psychologists like him see structural factors as one important influence among many and sociologists like Bynner consider them as more central to their interpretive framework.

Hendry and Kloep (2007a) also critique Arnett's emerging adult theory for being too much tied to specific culture and socio-economic conditions and assuming a more straightforward transition than in reality. They propose a model of transition where 'the connections between phases should be in a continual state of dynamic fluctuation to indicate plasticity and reversibility' (2007a, p.75). Arnett (2007a) responds by contending that this argument exaggerates the influence of social class, as there is sparse evidence to support a relationship between social class and well-being in emerging adulthood.

Hendry and Kloep propose that the emerging adult model should be combined with the life-span model to illustrate how young adult's response to developmental challenges depends on the resources they have to face them; 'The joint task for our theoretical analysis and Arnett's descriptive framework is to inform interventions that help individuals to find a "goodness of fit" between individual resources and challenges' (2007b, p.84).

Additional theoretical considerations

There are further theoretical approaches to development which must be considered. Furstenberg et al (2003) base their definition of early adulthood on those who are working toward attaining the major transitions of adulthood in modern society: leaving home, finishing education, becoming financially independent, getting married and having a child. Using the 1960 and 2000 US Censuses they identify that the age of achieving each of these transitions

has risen significantly. However, this approach has significant limitations as by this definition unmarried childless people are never adults and those whose education is drawn out or tied to career also will have greatly delayed adult status. Many others cannot claim full financial independence until much later in life, particularly in the current recession and so there are great difficulties in using structural markers or events to define the attainment of the adult status. They found that the most important events considered necessary to be an adult were being financially independent (97%) completing education (97%) working full-time (96%) and being able to support a family (94%). Leaving home was less important (84%) and getting married (55%) and having a child (52%) much less so. These views were consistent across gender, ethnicity and age, though older adults valued marriage and parenthood more. 'Even people who attend religious services regularly assign only slightly more importance to these family transitions' (Furstenberg et al 2003, p.8). They also found little agreement about when transition to adulthood should be, the most consistent and marked difference being by class, with younger, lower class individuals being more likely to subscribe to a younger timetable.

In another European context, drawing on data from the Swedish Board of Youth Affairs containing 3200 respondents aged 16–29, Westberg's study indicates that young people who have completed role transitions assign them less value for the importance of adult status (2004). However, becoming a parent is a role transition that is given great importance and is also in relation to the issue of responsibility.

Identity and individualisation

At the heart of this examination of the transition to adulthood lie identity issues which merit closer examination, especially on the process of becoming an adult.

Côté and Schwartz (2002) look at the link between the psychologically oriented identity status paradigm and the sociologically oriented individualization theory, to identify how the individualization process can be defined and measured ('operationalized') in terms of agency in identity formation. The 'Identity Status' paradigm is a psychological approach with origins in 1960s (through James Marcia) which identifies four graduating statuses based around the dimensions of 'exploration' and 'commitment'. These statuses vary according to the individual's level of maturity and social functioning from the least mature 'Identity Diffusion' through 'Identity Foreclosure' and 'Identity Moratorium' to 'Identity Achievement', the most mature and functionally complex status which reflects balanced thinking and mature interpersonal relationships, including give-and-take relationships with parents (Côté and Schwartz, 2002, p.572). Similar to the tension between sociological and psychological approaches to the transition to adulthood, this paradigm has been criticised, by sociologists

especially, for being narrow and overlooking social-contextual factors in which identity is formed.

The Sociological approach to these concepts is the 'Individualization' process which describes how people increasingly make major life decisions on their own 'including finding communities with which to establish integrative bonds on their own' (Côté and Schwartz 2002, p.573).

Individualization is defined as 'the tendency towards increasingly flexible self-awareness as the individual must make decisions and choose identities from among an increasingly complex range of options' (Wallace, 1995 cited by Côté and Schwartz 2002, p.573) so people develop themselves as self-determining individuals increasingly outside supportive communities. Life Course theories are increasingly used to examine the conditions for individualization and the transition to adulthood. Bynner (2005) emphasises that individualization is constrained by fundamentally social, cultural and structural forces which are variable over time.

It is important to note the difference between the psychological term 'individuation', (where someone develops a sense of their own self, with a distance from parents whilst not requiring absolute autonomy from them or a withdrawal of their support) and this concept of 'individualization', which is a social process 'by which people attempt to compensate for a lack of collective support from their community and culture, which may or may not implicate their parents' (Côté and Schwartz 2002, p.573), in other words the degree to which people are left to determine their own directions and choices.

Passive and default individualization

Individualization can be seen as both negative due to the level of psychosocial functioning required to overcome social obstacles, or positive when people become better prepared to face the challenges of life leading to positive self-improvement or 'developmental individualization'. Individualization can also become a more passive selection of 'default options' as part of a consumer-corporate society and mass culture, what Côté calls 'default individualization' (Côté and Schwartz 2002, Côté 2000, 2002).

Côté has a negative view of how the freedom from institutional guidance affects those transitioning to adulthood and believes developmental individualization requires identity capital in the form of self-understanding and self-discipline which, if lacking, leads to drifting into what he calls 'default individualization'; 'it involves a life course dictated by circumstance and folly, with little agentic assertion on the part of the person' (Côté 2000, p.33). Côté and Schwartz (2002) empirically found two forms of identity status representing identity synthesis (achievement) and identity confusion (diffusion). These are predicted in terms of identity

capital measures; 'Sociologically, achievement appears to represent a form of developmental individualization, while Diffusion typifies a form of default individualization' (p. 582)

Arnett (2000) argues that most identity exploration takes place in the 18-25 period rather than in adolescence and this is especially relevant to love, work and worldview. He cites William Perry (1999) who showed that changes in worldviews are often a central part of cognitive development during emerging adulthood, changing their worldview often when at college for instance. Arnett argues that although research on identity formation has mostly been focussed on adolescence, his research shows that identity achievement has rarely been reached by the end of high school and that identity development continues through the late teens and the twenties' (2004, p.9). Emerging adults may see the formation of their own independently formed beliefs as an essential part of becoming an adult, which has clear implications for spiritual and religious development in this period of life.

Schwartz et al (2005) contend that for emerging adults to make enduring life commitments (e.g., romantic commitments, career choices) by the end of their 20s, they must first undertake the psychological task of individually forming a stable and viable identity that can guide and sustain these commitments essentially a sense of self that they are comfortable to take into adulthood. Some emerging adults may find developmental identity formation difficult without external guidance or help, which may have decreased by this stage. Others may be more comfortable to capitalize on the extended transition to adulthood and opportunities to explore identity issues beyond their time in school. Their study indicates that emerging adults have diverse characteristics and this has implications for any attempts to characterize them as a group. Some easily make their way into the roles and responsibilities of adulthood, bolstered by more stable, coherent, and commitment-based identities, whereas others may require external help to transition into adult roles and responsibilities (Schwartz et al 2005).

Social and identity capital

Côté examines Putnam's concept of 'social capital', which is defined as something which 'fosters civic engagement by enhancing the "level of engagement, trust and reciprocity" that exists in a given concrete community' and as 'features of social life – networks norms and trusts –that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue their shared objectives' (Côté 2000, p.69 citing Putnam 1996, p.28). Côté considers how technological trends have caused decline in social trust by privatizing people's leisure time and lessening opportunities for social capital formation.

Bynner also highlights the idea of 'capital accumulation' as another way of looking at the concept of extended transition. Coleman (1988) develops the idea of social capital acquired through membership of associational networks based on trust. This is further developed in the concept of identity capital (Côté 1996, 2002) where adaptability, creativity and teamwork are also considered vital psychological attributes for participation in a modern labour market.

Côté's proposed a social psychological model of identity capital as an alternative to the psychological identity paradigm or the sociological individualisation process (Côté and Schwartz 2002; Côté, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2002). This model connects the intrapersonal dimensions of identity with the macro-level view of identity development, both recognising sociologically the lack of institutional support for individuals negotiating their life choices and goals, and also psychologically the importance of resources available to individuals to negotiate life choices and challenges. 'The common feature of these attributes is that they can afford the person cognitive and behavioural capacities with which to understand and negotiate the various obstacles and opportunities commonly encountered throughout late-modern adult life' (Côté and Schwartz 2002, p.575).

Côté's model postulates that those who most invest in their adult identities are best equipped to negotiate individualized life-course passages. It identifies the resources necessary for an individual to nurture and develop means of 'fitting in' or 'becoming' in the context of an individualized process which is increasingly required of them as they transition to the adult world. These resources can be tangible, including financial, social or educational resources, such as parents' social class and their investment in offspring, gender, and key group memberships. They can, however be more intangible resources such as an agentic personality, (e.g. ego strength or self-esteem) or advanced forms of psychosocial and intellectual development (e.g. critical thinking and moral reasoning) (Côté 2002).

'Most generally, the term identity capital denotes what individuals 'invest' in 'who they are'. Such investments potentially read future dividends in the 'identity markets' of later modern communities. To be a player in those markets, one must first establish as table sense of self, which is bolstered by social and technical skills in a variety of areas, effective behavioural repertoires, psychological development to more advance levels, and associations in key social and occupational networks.' (Côté 2000:209)

Cognitive development

Labouvie-Vief (2006) writes on the cognitive development of emerging adults and how it relates to moral development, self-understanding and affective changes presenting a portrait of cognitive development in emerging adulthood as dynamic, diverse and complex. Cultural context is vital and western culture has created new cognitive challenges and she presents

emerging adulthood as a crucial period for emergence of complex thinking in complex societies, but in a diverse way. 'The heart of the cognitive change that (potentially) occurs in emerging adulthood is that the person decides on a particular worldview but also recognises that there is an element of subjectivity in any worldview and diverse points of view should be recognized as adding to the total picture of what the truth is' (Arnett 2006c, p.306).

Such an approach is not the same as relativism but involves seeking the truth from different subjective and objective perspectives. Arnett points out that this perspective sees 'cognitive development in adolescence and beyond as occurring not in stages that are universal and ontogenetic but as levels that have some relation to age but whose development depends on contextual factors, especially education.' (2006c, p.206). Thus cognitive functioning at any given age can be diverse and Labovie-Vief believes that it tends to depend on educational attainment; she also claims that in the emerging adult period individuals 'begin to profoundly restructure their sense of self' (2006, p.68). Although this has to be further tested through research, it gives much food for thought if emerging adults' sense of self and capacity for self-reflection are so dynamic. 'Undistracted by either the peer whirl of adolescence or the family role demands of young adulthood, emerging adults are able to devote more attention to their sense of self.' (Arnett 2006c:307).

Factors contributing to the process of becoming an adult

Côté's theory of identity capital describes how the different elements of agency and structure are important in an individual becoming an adult. The distinction between agency and structure in that life course is shaped partly by structural and cultural influences but personal agency is required to determine life direction within this. 'This is precisely the point on which Arnett's emerging adult model over-estimates the extent to which young people can exercise choices that are free of constraints... opportunities may now be more extensive in certain areas and the windows to them may now stay open longer, but capitalizing on them is still critically dependent on the resources available to take advantage of them' (Côté and Bynner, 2008, p.263).

Hartmann and Swartz assert, in contrast to the claims of psychologists, that young adults understand their 'emerging adulthood' as a package of social roles and personal traits that is in the process of being cultivated and constructed. They admit that psychologists are correct to emphasise important individualistic characteristics; 'The key point here is that when asked to talk about their adulthood in their own terms, young adults used the language of

independence, maturity, autonomy, and responsibility, but almost always tied these concepts to social roles and statuses, experiences with others, and involvement in other and often new social positions and relationships' (Hartmann and Swartz 2006, p.9). They found that many could only relate to the characteristics insofar as they were tied to concrete social experiences.

Scabini et al (2006, p.xv) highlight how sustenance and support is now a much longer role into the future. 'The family is both a new resource and a new source of risk. This is the result of the ambiguous relationship between the family and society and of the opposing behaviours of generations within the family and society'. They suggest the role of the family has altered in this context, with a crucial process involving longer term support from the family but a diminished influence of adults outside of the family. 'In other words, today's young people, far from waging an intergenerational battle within the family, seem to have given up the search outside the family for adults who can provide alternative points of reference to those offered by their parents' (Scabini et al 2006, p.24). They identify two forces, namely the family unity or sense of belonging and the push to separation or autonomy and suggest that 'transition to adulthood is therefore a joint enterprise'.

This then leads to the question of what would be the impact if the influence of other adults actually complemented that of parents. Scabini et al stress the role of the associated generational perspective in addition to young people's social and familial patterns:

'To safeguard the younger generation's progress towards adulthood, the role played by the adult generation, not only in the family but also in society, is crucial: it must transform its generative energies by more explicitly directing them towards the social context...Only by opposing the dangerous schism between the family and social realms can a constructive generational 'change of guard' take place, accompanied by the strengthening of the younger generation in its task of embracing adult responsibilities' (2006, p.29).

Reifman et al (2007) examined the connection between parenting and the levels of exploration of their emerging adult children; although they are not able to prove a causal link, they suggest that parents' failure to allow autonomy to develop in their children may reduce the latter's experience of emerging adult relevant perceptions and a sense of future orientation

As has been outlined, achieving adult status comes at different times and young people may face status inconsistencies where 'the traditional socialising agencies such as the extended and nuclear family, the church and the school are no longer effective agencies of social reproduction. They no longer channel individuals into predetermined niches and levels of society' (Evans and Furlong 1997:33).

‘...more and more young people around the world are finding that they must organize their own paths through life and they are increasingly left to their own resources to do so. This can be tremendously liberating—or terrifically burdensome—depending on the resources at the person’s disposal.’ (Côté 2002, p.118)

‘Relationships are primary supports that help youth navigate adolescence and the transition to adulthood. Therefore, there is also a strong need for building and supporting family relationships and resources’ (Zarrett and Eccles 2006, p.24). Zarrett and Eccles argue that programs should be developmentally appropriate by providing opportunity for increasing autonomy and allowing young people to participate in program decision making and leadership, as well as by exposing youth to intellectually and cognitively challenging material.

Wyn and Woodman (2006) argue that young people’s subjectivities provide an insight into their active participation in and shaping of change processes; ‘A conceptualisation of youth as simply ‘transition’ to adulthood, from this perspective, becomes vastly inadequate’ (Wyn and Woodman 2006, p.511).

Henderson et al took a qualitative longitudinal approach which uses a number of interviews ‘to capture the version of self that individuals were themselves forging’ (Henderson et al 2007:19). They draw on Gidden’s controversial notion of the ‘reflexive project of self’ which recognises that individuals must invent themselves, deciding who and what they want to be. They consider the process of individuals negotiating the process of growing up; ‘We are all in the vivid present, attempting to get somewhere, but to an elusive place. Adulthood does not exist, it has to be invented.’ (20).

Henderson et al go on to demonstrate why they believe that it is a combination of the individual’s own creation of their identity but in combination with the context in which they are developing. ‘We are not simply authors of our own destinies, but are located in time, space and social structure’ (2007, p.22). Arnett sees ‘individual development as a function of the interaction between persons and multiple ecological contexts’ (2006c, p.304) and describes a shift from dependence on parents to system commitments in the form of obligations to careers, partners and children. This shift takes place during emerging adulthood when people tend to explore various possibilities and evaluate their learning before making long-term commitments. Arnett describes this period of identity exploration and instability when emerging adults see a time of freedom to make choices.

Arnett cites William S. Aquillino’s chapter within the same book which uses the family life-course framework to emphasize ‘the interdependence of family members’ life paths and the constant interplay between individual development and family development’ (2006c, p.314).

Thus relationships between parents and their emerging adult sons and daughters can change in nature from a hierarchical one to more of a friendship and Aquillino observes that quality may improve.

This suggests that families may continue to have a significant role but it can be concluded from this detailed examination of the literature that the process of transition to adulthood is a complex one. Shaping structures such as family and other social influences are important, as are the agency acquired by the individual as he or she develops their own identity on the way to achieving adult status. Bearing in mind the focus of this research and in the developmental context which has been described, how then might faith develop in those who are transitioning to adulthood?

Faith and spiritual development

There has been considerable attention given to people's social and psychological development and the impact on their outlook and behaviour; consideration is now given to how faith develops in young adults and what is necessary to help their spiritual development.

Faith development

Astley (1994) examines the concept of what faith is and cites the New Testament text 'When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me' (1 Corinthians 13:11, New International Version).¹⁶ 'There is a claim that lies at the heart of faith development theory: that there is a development through childhood *and* adulthood...in our way of being in faith' (Astley 1994, p.2). Does this suggest that both theoretically and theologically one can expect an individual to reach adult maturity in faith? If so, what does this adult maturity look like and when is it reached?

Francis and Astley (2002, p.65) point out that even faith as a concept can be ambiguous and that human faith is not necessarily religious. Parks asserts that faith should be considered as more than belief but is 'the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience' (2000, p.7). She examines many definitions and aspects of faith, as both verb and noun, and concludes that 'mature adult faith composes meaning in self-conscious engagement with the repeated dissolution and repatterning of one's perceptions of the fabric of life, in the dynamic reconceiving of the assumed connections

¹⁶ Or in the more literal English Standard Version 'When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.'

among persons, things, ideas, events, symbols, the natural and social order, space and time' (Parks 2000, p.33). Parks describes the young adult period as one where faith and meaning are composed and recomposed.

There are a number of approaches to faith development but the approach of James Fowler is by far the most commonly referenced in literature on faith development, indeed some seem to accept his theories uncritically. His work acknowledges the differences in content of people's faith, but focuses more on the universal forms of faith or the ways in which people have faith, rather than the object of the faith. He said in his original work 'I believe that faith is a human universal. We are endowed at birth with nascent capacities for faith' (1981, p.xiii). Astley interprets this thinking as follows: 'What Fowler means by faith is essentially an orientation of the person to life, our 'way-of-being-in-relation' to what we believe to be ultimate...a disposition, a stance, 'a way of moving into and giving form and coherence to life' (1994, p.3). Fowler's emphasis is on faith as a verb rather than a noun (Fowler 1992, p.4) and as a process, in which he identifies up to seven of stages through which an individual can pass in sequence, and the transition from one to the next is marked by characteristic change in one or more aspects of faith.

Fowler's first 4 stages cover the period from 0 – 18 years old, namely Stage 0: Faith as nursed and foundational, Stage 1: Faith as chaotic, unordered and impressionistic, Stage 2: Faith as ordering and Stage 3: Faith as conforming. By stage 3 Fowler believes that the ability to think abstractly is fully developed along with the ability to empathise, so educators can engage young people in more abstract teaching and discussion. However, he states that it is only beyond this into the adult stages that faith is fully owned by the individual, as up until that point they are unable to properly reflect on beliefs or values. He suggests that at the age of around 17 or 18 individuals are able to fully choose their own self-reflective, critical faith as they no longer can tolerate faith being second hand (Francis and Astley 2002, p.70). This is a controversial view for a number of reasons, and it is necessary to consider how this framework is affected by the developmental changes examined previously in this chapter. If adolescence is starting earlier, perhaps young people are more likely to have a personally owned faith at an earlier age, but if emerging adults are still developing their own worldview, they may be likely to hold, or alter their personal faith at a later stage than Fowler's model suggests.

Astley does pick up on this point; acknowledging the criticisms of Fowler's model, he suggests that Fowler's stage 4 may be described as a stage of 'Choosing Faith' (1995, p.25). He goes on to provide an interesting assessment of this framework in relation to young adults and their relationship with the church:

'Fowler notes that the transition to this stage of faith can be long, perhaps taking several years, and traumatic. For many of those in transition the period will seem to be a time of loss of faith, but it is in fact only a loss of one way of being in faith in order to take on a very different way – a more critical, reflective and owned faith. I would argue that educators and pastors need to be particularly sensitive here, allowing young people space to grow out of one stage of faithing to another' (Astley 1995, p.25).

Francis and Astley suggest that this stage of faith can see the fruition of the kind of sacramental commitments made earlier in their teens; 'By discussions and arguments in the youth group, young people begin to hold up their faith for examination and to learn and appreciate the arguments for the particular religious position which they decide to take up' (2002, p.260). Perhaps this viewpoint makes a number of assumptions about a young person's church experience which perhaps ought to be true, but may not be in reality.

Parks has written in depth about ministry with young people in this age range and acknowledges the apparent contradictions in the faith of some of those she ministered to. 'What puzzled me was that even the most 'mature' students continued, even after graduation, to exhibit a mixture of both 'dependent' and 'inner-dependent' behaviours' (Parks 1992, p.203). In her significant work 'Big Questions, Worthy Dreams', Parks looks in detail at the approach to ministry with those in this stage of life and underlines the importance of recognising their generational context. 'We live in 'cusp time'. The young adult task of composing and recomposing meaning and faith now takes place in a culture making its way through a similar set of rapids – a turning point in the flow of history, shaped by new technologies that have spawned accelerated, permanent change and unprecedented conditions prompting reconsideration of every feature of life' (Parks 2000, p.9).

Fowler's theory has been critiqued from a number of other angles, especially by those who resist the idea of distinct stages and prefer an approach of patterns or styles of faith; it has been said that it emphasises the role of the individual, rather than that of God, is too individualistic, failing to recognise the role of community, and is based on unreliable research (Astley 1994). Other criticism of Fowler's work includes his underestimation of the cognitive capacities of younger children, a 'methodological and psychometric weakness' (Webster 1992, p.81) and a reliance on data not specific enough to test his hypothesis. Fowler is accused of too easily distinguishing the form and content of faith in a way which fails to recognise that what makes faith religious is more than a difference in content (Francis and Astley 2002, p.68).

The theological basis of Fowlers understanding of faith is critiqued from an evangelical point of view by Jones (2004) who suggests that 'Fowlerian stage-development and Christian faith-development are fundamentally dissimilar phenomena' (2004, p.346). He focuses on how Fowler's theory describes all forms of faith so that the content is not particular, as faith is a

way of knowing that does not require assent to a specific knowledge. Jones concludes that it is 'impossible to offer an amended version of Fowlerian stage-development that accurately characterizes Christian faith-development without either compromising an evangelical understanding of faith or compromising the internal coherence of Fowler's research' (Jones 2004, p.253). However whilst providing this stern critique of the theology of Fowler's influential work, he does not reject its usefulness from an evangelical Christian perspective, proposing that rather than trying to adapt or replace Fowler's stages to fit an evangelical perspective, there should be a recognition that 'the *content* of Fowlerian stage-development provides the *context* for the Christian faith' (Jones 2004, p.355).

Johnson questions the compatibility of growth theory to Christian theology; 'those committed to a theology of the cross, who believe in the redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ as the source of all hope and salvation, may very well question the validity and value of any theories that stress how much it is humans 'make it'' (1982, p.170). He goes on to present biblical images of growth in terms of transformation rather than growth, that growth is natural and expected and that Christian maturity is dynamic (1982, p.172). He relates these very firmly to the context of a child growing up within a family of faith and highlights the importance of sacrament of baptism and confirmation, arguing that how the faith is taught should initially instil a sense of belonging (Westerhoff's 'affiliative faith', described later) as the child or young person learns to identify with the community; 'The church is the context where young children experience trust, where somewhat older children learn the symbols and stories that belong to the church, where youth are both challenged and supported in their search for identity, and where adults, while continuing to experience all the above, are encouraged to search and grow into new dimensions of what it means to be Christian' (Johnson 1982, p.176).

Hughes (1997) also gives an evangelical theological examination of Fowler's concept of faith development and highlights ways Christian faith is different from what Fowler describes, notably in its supernatural elements. He goes on to argue that faith concerns trusting in Christ and believing in a factual way, with a responsive behavioural obedience being the result of God's work in the individual; 'the biblical position that faith is a gift from God makes a significant difference to the way faith is understood' (1997, p.4).

Osmer gives Fowler's work a detailed and rigorous theological evaluation from a reformed theological perspective. He identifies difficulties that Reformed theologians will have with a theory which relies on a developmental pattern of faith in light of their reformed understanding of sin and grace; 'they sense a violation of the "deep structure" of a transformational pattern of grace as found in Niebuhr and Calvin' (1990, p.60). Osmer

concludes with the question 'can the Reformed tradition be satisfied with a version of cultural relativism, or does it have a stake in the search for universal structures of human existence under the Sovereign God?' (1990, p.67-68); he suggests the answer is no, but there may be other models of faith development which are a more comfortable fit within the reformed evangelical context or perhaps a different approach is necessary.

Westerhoff presented contrasting thinking about developing faith in a model around styles of faith, rather than stages associated with particular ages. He describes these styles in terms of the rings of a tree; 'a tree with one ring is as much a tree as a tree with four rings...In a similar way, one style of faith is not a better or greater faith than another' (2000, p.88). Westerhoff's original model had four styles of Experienced Faith, Affiliative Faith, Searching Faith and Owned Faith; he later revised this to three styles, using a pilgrimage metaphor of 'pathways to God' – the Experiential Way, the Reflective Way and the Integrative Way (2000, p.101-102). In terms of life stage, he associates these with childhood, adolescence and adulthood respectively, but if we acknowledge the previous literature on the changing transition to adulthood, by Westerhoff's framework emerging adults would be somewhere between Reflective and Integrative.

In the absence of a truly 'reformed' model of faith development, the question of whether faith can be seen in such terms must be considered. Nelson (1992) examines this question, referring to Fowler's approach and comment that 'it becomes terribly important for us to work with this understanding of faith and to try to formulate and symbolise it so that it exerts truly transformative power over our more parochial faith orientations' (1981, p.23). Nelson's striking response is 'This assignment bewilders me. First, I don't know of a living religion that was created by formula. To think that an abstract principle which we formulate would transform living religions with thousands of years of tradition is hard for me to imagine.' (Nelson 1992, p.65)

Nelson argues that faith does not develop in stages in the way that Fowler's model states; and from his point of view, it is not faith which develops in stages, but the individual, and their faith can be worked out in practice with the beliefs to which the individual gives allegiance. Nelson argues from the position of faith which sees God as an active agent in human life, as described in the New Testament book of Hebrews, chapter 11 that 'faith is not a generalised human state that assists one to become properly socialised or mature...faith is a way to relate to and know God who has a work agenda for those who believe' (1992, p.75).

In his book 'How Faith Matures' (1989) Nelson proposes that faith develops under the influence of God as the individual encounters life, especially within the context of the

community of faith; he goes on to argue for a 'strategy for faith maturation' which recognises the local church as the only place to practically nurture faith in the face of a secular society and which recognises that Christian faith matures in the context of faith community.

Parks (2000) writes extensively about the importance of community in shaping faith, based on the Piagetian paradigm's conviction that becoming human depends on the quality of one's interaction with the social world. 'Faith is a patterning, connective, relational activity embodied and shaped not within the individual alone but in the comfort and challenges of the company we keep' (Parks 2000, p.89). She describes how community provides both security which affords the freedom to grow and become, and simultaneously constraint through providing norms and boundaries. 'Young adulthood is nurtured into being, and its promise is most powerfully realised through participation in a community that poses a trustworthy alternative to earlier assumed knowing.' (Parks 2000, p.93). She suggests that the best form of community for young adults is a mentoring community which provides both challenge and encouragement

'Simply wanting to belong is no longer enough. The young adult self depends upon and responds to those individuals and groups that express patterns of meaning resonant with the experience and the new critical awareness of the still fragile, inner-dependent self....A place that recognizes gifts and potential competence of the young adult, and that requires only as much inner-dependent strength as the young adult yet has, meets the yearning for power and communion in their young adult forms'. (Parks 2000, p.95)

This idea of a growing or maturing faith within the context of the Christian community is that which will be used in the remainder of this study. While there will be an emphasis on the stages of human development through which individuals pass, impacting their outlook on all matters including faith, the development of faith will be viewed as something more as growth in context, rather than stages which are to be passed through.

Theologian James Loder (1982, 1998) provides a useful additional perspective on the faith in young adults in the context of this study. He also argues that Fowler's work has little to do with the Christian understanding of faith and that, while stage theories give some context to understand how individuals change in their relationship with the world, including matters of religion, it is the transforming work of the Spirit of God which transcends these stages and categories.

Loder explains his perspective on development which differentiates the development of the ego from spiritual development; he has an understanding of human development which acknowledges chronological or stages of development, but a theological perspective which has

God at the centre. Loder leans on the work of philosopher Kierkegaard to present spiritual change as the emergence of intimacy with God, the work of the pure love of God in an individual. He points out that such intimacy makes no sense to the well-socialized ego and so Kierkegaard's concept is of a love which changes the ego; 'It is the love expressed by a transformed ego, a dialectical identity' (1998, p.252).

Within this framework of understanding, Loder leans on Erikson to identify that 'sooner or later what is at stake in young adulthood is the willingness to risk fusion of one's own identity with another' (1998, p.253). Loder believes that the most powerful intimacy is that with the Spirit of God and that, crucially for the context of this study, the theologically reformed understanding of faith is aligned with the transformed, dialectical identity described above. He cites the father of reformed theology, John Calvin who wrote 'Now we shall have a complete definition of faith, if we say, that it is a steady and certain knowledge of the Divine benevolence towards us, which, being founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ, is both revealed to our minds, and confirmed to our hearts, by the Holy Spirit' (Calvin's Institutes 3.2.7 cited in Loder 1998, p.267).

The implication is, at this crucial time developmentally, for the young adult to have a faith which is vital and mature, it involves an understanding of true intimacy with God. 'At the very point where I know what it is best for me to be me, I discover that it is the spiritual presence of Christ that knows better than I do what it is for me to be me' (Loder 1998, p.265).

As this section has considered faith development for the young adult, it is concluded that as well as being something which is essentially growing and maturing, is also transformative; and as well as having a crucial community context, is also fundamentally about a maturing relationship with God.

Spiritual development

One final area to consider is that of spiritual development. In contrast to the concept of faith development, this has a more practical aspect in relation to youth work which is part of the overall development of a young person. Bensen and Roehlkepartain argue strongly for the importance of addressing spiritual development as part of a holistic approach to youth development because it is 'an intrinsic part of being human' (2008, p.14); they highlight the links between spiritual development and other areas such as civic development, coping, resilience and well-being, citing Larson et al's assertion that programmatic emphasis on spiritual development has a particularly strong relationship with identity formation during adolescence (2008, pp.15-16).

Peterson picks up on this theme by stating that spiritual development in adolescence is essential as part of the broader holistic approach to youth development; 'Spiritual development would seem to be more like identity development than pubertal development' (2008, p.122). Green (2008) also supports these arguments in a British context, intentionally having spirituality at the core of youth work, returning to its historical and philosophical roots.

Summary and conclusion: faith and spiritual development in context

Within the discussions in this chapter, four key contexts have emerged as important in considering the relationship between an individual's developmental transition to adulthood and their faith and spiritual development.

Context 1: holistic development

There are strong arguments that any examination of the developmental process must be holistic and contextual. Henderson et al (2007) advocate a holistic approach, as they attempted to gain insight into the relationship between the unique life (biography), the context within which it is located (structure) and the processes of which it is part (history, social mobility, intergenerational transfers etc). A young person's faith development must be seen in the context of their broader development and the wider context in which they live and therefore the significant social and developmental changes outlined in this chapter must be understood and applied to the faith context. How have these changes impacted young people and their engagement in the church?

It has been noted how, in the context of the impact of postmodern society, adolescence and the transition to adulthood has been elongated and there is a strong argument for the occurrence of a new developmental phase, which Arnett and others refer to as 'emerging adulthood'. This has far reaching implications, not least in the increased opportunity for young people to explore their identity. Others have even suggested the necessity of having a new way of understanding adulthood and maturity.

In 'Souls in Transition', Smith created 'an expansive map of the larger sociocultural terrain within which we can locate and better understand their religious and spiritual lives more specifically' (2009, p.75). Smith notes emerging adults have more frequent transitions, associated breaks in routine and even geographical relocation; 'the sheer plenitude of life transitions that emerging adults experience themselves has the tendency to lessen the frequency and importance of religious practices and potentially undercut established religious

beliefs' (2009, p.76). Smith also points out the common busyness of emerging adults and the number of distractions they may have which may compete with any commitment to their spiritual development. Furthermore, he identifies religion as an area of life where emerging adults may chose to demonstrate a difference and independence from their family background. These and other issues raised by Smith will be examined more closely in the next chapter, but there is clear evidence that understanding this period of transition is very important for examining the spiritual lives of those in this stage of life which 'embodies its own distinctive characteristics, tendencies and experiences' (Smith 2009, p.279)

Context 2: Northern Ireland

Faith and religious expression also cannot be examined independently of the context of the multitude of other factors in which it develops, and this is nowhere more pertinent than in countries like Northern Ireland where religious heritage and identity are historically strong. Henderson and her colleagues found that through the 10 years of their study 'while formalised religious practice is the exception rather than the norm, young people relate to the presence or absence of religion in their lives in a way that underlines the links between it and identity, community and politics. Despite the low numbers who professed to ritual religious practice, the majority acknowledge a spiritual element in their lives...' (Henderson et al 2007, p.113). Those in Northern Ireland continued to express the highest levels of religious affiliation, practice and heritage but there was also evidence of declining ritual practice. One respondent commented 'everyone comes from religious families but no one follows it' (2007, p.114). There was a general suggestion that 'religious practice was something 'inflicted' on them by grandparents' (114); for many of the sample from Northern Ireland in study, religion is enmeshed with political and ethnic identities and is an expression of community belonging (Henderson et al 2007, p.116). The role of mothers and grandmothers in the passing on of faith was often seen as important. For many, religious identity is central and defines community and ethnic belonging; it forms an identity marker for many rather than an indicator of practice.

'Several young people in our study subscribed to their religion as an identity marker; they believe in God; they pray, but rarely attend services; they feel no obligation to live by the teachings of their church. They come from families where parents continue to practice their faith but no longer have an influence over them.' (Henderson et al 2007, p.122).

Context 3: Individual identity

The concept of identity has emerged as a strongly significant one in the literature on all aspects of development and it is therefore again important to consider this holistically. The concept of identity capital has been acknowledged in terms of how individuals invest in who they are and some have highlighted that the identity status of an individual can occur in an active or a passive way. Thus the impact of agency and structure on individuals has been shown to be important in how they develop their own resources for identity development and how others around them contribute to this process. Thus there are obvious links to how young people develop identity in a religious or faith sense.

Context 4: Personal faith

The examination of the literature on faith development has highlighted the importance of models of stage development as championed by Fowler but also how this has been critiqued. It has been concluded that, rather than developing in distinct stages, faith is better considered in terms of growing, maturing and being transformed. The social context of faith has also been identified to be vital, both in terms of the influence of relational community and the importance of one's relationship with God. Again, the role of the ritual and rites of passage are important in this context and any understanding of young adults' relationship with the church requires examination of this communal, relational context.

In acknowledging these important contexts, the following are proposed as useful concepts to help inform the examination of the place of emerging adults in the church.

- *Faith capital*

Similar to the ideas of Côté who suggests that individuals invest in 'who they are' as 'identity capital', it is proposed that there will be similar investment in terms of one's faith, referred to as *faith capital*, which refers to the resources required to become a mature Christian adult. Faith capital should be differentiated from the religious or spiritual capital, a term which seems to lack any clear definition but is used to refer to 'a linguistic union of the academically-respectable concept of capital (both 'human' and 'social') and the vague but popular notion of spirituality' (Iannaccone and Klick 2003). Broadly speaking faith capital refers to the quantification of the value to individuals, groups and society of spiritual, moral or psychological beliefs and practice; it essentially concerns what is necessary to equip young people's growth towards achieving their own mature faith as they are transformed spiritually.

- *Active or passive spiritual individualisation*

Another of Côté's concepts concerns those who do not go through effective individualisation process and may then end up in an unhealthy default or passive individualisation. If, according to Côté, effective socialisation must be active, it is proposed that churches should ensure that there is *active spiritual individualization* which enables young people to make intentional progress towards a mature faith. This would be in an effort to avoid young people who are not well equipped spiritually and given the right resources for developing their own faith do they fall into a form of default passive spiritual individualisation. If this happens, it could be that this is stagnant and spiritually unproductive and thus increases likelihood of leaving or drifting from the church.

- *The role of agency and structure*

Again, in line with the comparison to identity capital, it is also apparent that there are forces of agency and structure which help an individual to develop their faith. Thus *faith capital* is a combination of aspects of themselves which they develop towards spiritual maturity (i.e. what resources they develop and invest in) and influences from other agents (families, faith community, peers) in spiritual development. Smith argues that 'if communities of other adults who care about youth wish to nurture emerging adult lives of purpose, meaning and character – instead of confusion, drifting, and shallowness – they will need to do better jobs of seriously engaging youth from early on and not cut them adrift as they move through the teenage years' (2009, p.299).

In considering these contexts and concepts, it is concluded that emerging adults' faith and church connection can best be understood by examining three broad areas of influence:

- **FAMILY:** The research must consider the various ways that the family context in which the individual grows up can influence their faith development. This includes considering both immediate and wider family generally as an agency of socialisation and specific ways in which young people learn faith and are equipped to develop spiritually.
- **COMMUNITY:** The other major social context is the individual's faith community and the specific role of other adults and peers must be considering. This includes both the ways that context teaches them faith generally and specific questions around how actively they spiritually individualise young people.
- **PERSONAL:** The way individuals personally develop aspects of their own faith must also be considered. This includes spiritual practices, involvement in faith community and how their experiences of church and family life have generally helped them to develop their own sense of faith ('owned faith' to use Westerhoff's term), in light of individual needs.

Conclusion

The examination of the holistic development of emerging adults has given some clear direction to this research, in that it raises some specific questions. These include the question of how the social and developmental changes of the modern age have impacted emerging adults' faith and their engagement with the church. Within this, the role of the faith community (*structure*) must be examined closely, both in terms of the significance of relationships within it and the role of rituals and markers towards maturity. Similarly, there must be consideration of how churches invoke *active spiritual individualization* to equip young people (*agency*) with the necessary *faith capital* in their growth and spiritual change. This also requires consideration of what assumptions might be made within churches about spiritual and holistic development in relation to achieving mature faith and how these might be tested. It is proposed that these matters can best be understood by examining the role of family, faith community and personal faith development.

All these questions will be examined through the literature on emerging adults' engagement with and leaving of the church (chapter 4) in the process of postulating what are the key factors in keeping them close (chapter 5). Within these discussions, the themes of community influence, agency and participation, developmental patterns continue to be prominent.

Chapter 4: young people leaving church

It is not contentious to say that the church in the West is numerically in decline; various international studies show falling church attendance and diminishing numbers of children and young people especially (Bryant et al 2003, Dudley 1999, Francis 1989, Haddaway and Roof 1998, Hunsberger 1978, Miller and Nelson 1996, Pascarella and Terenzini 1991, Schweitzer 2000, Smith et al 2002, Ueker et al 2007, Voas 2009, Voas and Crockett 2005).

‘While there are indeed many interesting variations in European religion – countries may be high or low in affiliation, attendance, and belief – there is also a single, inescapable theme. Religion is in decline. Each generation in every country surveyed is less religious than the last, measured by the best available index of religiosity.’ (Voas 2009, p.167)

Even in the relatively insular and culturally unique churches of Northern Ireland, where there is a higher starting point than the rest of the UK, figures show a steady decline (Kay and Francis, 1996, p.26, Francis et al 2006) and it is important to note the distinctiveness of this region as outlined earlier. Francis et al (2006) point out that there has been some resistance to the secularisation process seen in the rest of the UK. They found that although more sixth years worshipped less frequently in public and private, there was only marginal growth in the proportion of those young people who completely rejected religion and in some areas religious belief increased, for example adherence to certain orthodox truths. This significant data shows the complexity of religious adherence patterns and how the compound socio-political situation in Northern Ireland is inextricably linked to religious expression. This study covered the period of 1968 to 1998, the approximate length of the region’s civil and political unrest and Francis et al suggest political changes following this period may produce different patterns of religious adherence in the young. A follow up study is due which may shed some light on this but the evolving landscape of Northern Ireland is yet to be fully understood. The subsequent ten years have seen the impact of wider developmental and cultural changes among the young to which Ulster youth will not be immune and all these variables must be considered when examining patterns of church attendance in the region. This chapter will seek to identify some key issues and work towards an explanation for declining numbers of young people attending church, leading to consideration of how this might be addressed in the chapter 5.

Levels of decline in P.C.I.

Despite the declining religious affiliation and belief in Northern Ireland, Henderson et al (2007, p.114) highlight its unique character in a UK context, finding that young people from Northern

Ireland have the highest levels of religious affiliation, practice and heritage, but declining ritual practice. Published statistics have limited use in indicating levels of church attendance and even less in identifying the reasons for young people leaving church. In the census of 2001, 20.69% of the population stated their religion as Presbyterian, compared to 21.35% in 1991 (N.I.S.R.A. 1992, 2002), falling from 30.46% in 1937 (N.I. Census 1937)¹⁷. Interestingly, those who said they had no religion or did not state a religion rose from 7.28% in 1991 to 13.88% in 2001, but all such figures must be treated with caution in a region where many, especially Catholics, may not have completed that question in the census for political or religious reasons. McAllister (2005) points out the complications caused by changes in the voluntary and compulsory nature of the religion question in the Census, but argues that the increase in the secular group is largely at the expense of the main Protestant denominations. The significant socio-political changes in Northern Ireland since this census means the 2011 figures may be very different; trends suggest that this group of non-religious adherents will be the second or third largest group in Northern Ireland by 2011.

	2001	
	Population	% Presbyterian
All persons	348742	20.69%
Age 0-4	17486	15.17%
Age 5-11	30433	17.37%
Age 12-15	19128	17.78%
Age 16-17	9427	17.63%
Age 18-19	8398	17.27%
Age 20-24	18939	17.31%
Age 25-34	45646	18.84%
Age 35-49	71576	20.48%
Age 50 – pensionable age	53489	24.03%
Pensionable age – age 74	43739	27.10%
Age 75+	30481	30.44%

Table 4.1: 2001 Census for Northern Ireland – proportion of Presbyterians by age cohort

Breaking down religious affiliation by age is somewhat more useful, and table 4.1 shows that in 2001 the age cohort closest to the national average of 20.69% Presbyterian were those in the 35-49 age bracket, (20.48% Presbyterian); aside from pre-school age (15.17%), young people up to 25 were around 17% Presbyterian, whereas a considerably higher proportion of those over pensionable age were Presbyterian. This merely confirms that the proportion of the population which claims to be Presbyterian (or whose parents claim such), is decreasing inversely with age, but says nothing about patterns of church attendance or belief.

¹⁷ 2011 census published initial results in July 2012 but the breakdown by religion was not yet available

Morrow (2004) demonstrates from the adult Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey that Presbyterian respondents aged 18-34 who attend church at least once a month fell from 62% in 1989 to 44% in 2001. Correspondingly those who never attend church rose from 15% to 25%, in contrast to older age cohorts where attendance was shown to be more constant.

Frequency (%)	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<i>belonging to any religion</i>	88	84	83	83	79
Presbyterian*	22	22	21	21	21
Church of Ireland*	12	13	14	12	13
Methodist*	3	3	4	3	3
Catholic*	53	54	50	50	51

Table 4.2: Northern Ireland Young Life Times Survey – religion.

Question: Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion.

The figures in Table 4.2 are a compilation of statistics from the Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey produced by ARK, a collaboration of the University of Ulster and Queens University Belfast (ARK 2003-7)¹⁸. The annual survey of young people aged 16 shows those who stated that they belonged to any religion decreased somewhat in the 4 year period from 88% to 79%. Within that number, the proportion of Presbyterians remains roughly similar, falling from 19% of the total sample in 2003 to 16.5% in 2007.

Frequency	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Once per week	44	46	41	46	44
2-3 times /wk	14	12	10	11	11
Once /month	7	4	7	6	4
Several times / yr	11	11	13	10	11
Less frequently	10	12	13	12	14
Never	13	14	14	14	16
Don't know	1	1	1	1	1
No answer	0	0	1	1	-

Table 4.3: Northern Ireland Young Life Times Survey – church attendance

Question: Apart from special occasions such as weddings, funerals, baptisms and so on, how often nowadays do you attend services or meetings connected with your religion?

The same Young Life and Times survey shows a fairly consistent pattern of church attendance amongst this age group which is higher than some might expect, with around 44% attending at least weekly, though these are a percentages of those who said they belonged to a particular religion. However, the figures in table 4.3 are also very limited in how much they tell about

¹⁸ This question was no longer asked in the survey after 2007.

actual patterns of church attendance, church leaving and the reasons for doing so, as for instance the figures do not differentiate between a youth group meeting and a church service. Although a direct comparison cannot be made, Francis et al (2006, p.7) also found only a small increase in those Northern Ireland 6th Formers who never attended church from 1968 to 1998, 13% of boys rising to 15%, and 5% of girls rising to 9%. Although church attendance is undoubtedly falling in Northern Ireland, even from a higher base than GB, it is reasonable to assume that there is still a very large proportion with some kind of church connection or influence, however small.

A Tear Fund survey of 7,000 people in 2007 found there are significantly more church goers in Northern Ireland compared with the rest of the United Kingdom, with 45% attending at least monthly compared to 15% national average (Ashworth and Farthing 2007). Even bearing these figures in mind, the numbers attending in Northern Ireland are still clearly decreasing. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland specifically has published statistics for many years which show that the denomination, like all others, is in decline and these statistics are worth examining in closer detail. Table 4.4 shows a summary of collated statistics from 1920 onwards and there are some interesting patterns relating to Presbyterian adherence generally and youth and children in particular.

Year	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Families	87,215	94,536	100,587	111,866	125,603	131,414	126,145	122,541	114,439	104,931
Diff. 10 years		7321	6051	11299	13737	5811	-5269	-3604	-8102	-9508
% diff. 10 years					-12.3%	-4.6%	-4.0%	-2.9%	-6.6%	-8.3%
Persons				367,745	389,000	395,513	354,768	320,512	281,324	246,480
Diff. 10 years					21255	6513	-40745	-34256	-39188	-34884
% diff. 10 years					+5.8%	+1.7%	-10.3%	-9.7%	-12.2%	-12.4%
Baptisms	7647	6042	6107	6914	7022	6284	4776	3424	2229	1,624
Diff. 10 years		-1605	+65	+807	+108	-738	-1508	-1352	-1195	-605
% diff 10 years						-10.5%	-24.0%	-28.3%	-34.9%	-27.1%
1st communicants	4121	4251	4060	3816	4534	3683	3747	2619	1849	1,863
Communicants	104849	108986	118203	125775	136554	141072	132555	128255	117719	107,743
No. in SS & BC	108740	96836	83106	76636	80242	69604	64769	43731	33056	24617
Diff. 10 years		-11904	-13730	-6470	+3606	-10638	-4835	-21038	-10675	-8439
% diff. 10 years					+4.7%	-13.3%	-6.9%	-32.5%	-24.4%	-26%

Table 4.4 Presbyterian Church in Ireland: Membership and Sunday Schools

(figures collated from Presbyterian Church in Ireland General Assembly reports from 1920 to 2011)

Presbyterians have traditionally measured their membership in families, (households), relating to the covenantal model at the core of the church and these rose from 87,215 families in 1920 to 131,414 in 1970 but have declined since then, returning recently to the same levels as the mid 1940s (table 4.4). One important factor is that households decreased in size proportionately less compared to individuals, with many more one person households and it being less common for extended families to share a house, for example. So, although families have declined by 18.2% from their peak in 1970 until 2010, when individuals are measured the decline is over a third (35.5%). Interestingly numbers of communicants, (perhaps considered the 'core' attending membership, though not necessarily the most committed), have declined much less sharply compared to numbers of professing members. Although the number of communicants in 2008 was 22.3% less than at its peak in 1970, this may suggest that more 'fringe' members are the first casualties.

Falkiner highlights the obvious effects of the World Wars on Sunday school and Bible class attendance as the First World War 'seems to mark the start of a serious falling-off in Public Worship, a general apathy towards the Christian Faith, widespread indifference among parents to the vows they made at the time of baptism of their children, and a relaxation of parental control' (1966, p.13). Even allowing for the effects of the war and post-war demographic and cultural factors, (for instance late 1950s increases are probably due to the post war 'baby boom'), Falkiner may not have dared to anticipate the rate of decline in P.C.I. membership.

Reductions	1960-2010		1990 – 2010	
	No.	%	No.	%
Families	20,672	16.5	17,610	14.4
Persons	142,520	36.7	74,032	23.1
Baptisms	5,398	76.9	1,800	52.6
1 st communicants	2,671	58.9	756	28.9
Communicants	28,811	21.1	20,512	16.0
No in SS & BC	55,625	69.3	19,112	43.7

Table 4.5 Reductions in church involvement over 50 and 20 year periods to 2010

Table 4.5 shows more clearly how the numbers of 'persons' has decreased by 36.7% in the 50 years to 2010, compared to a 16.5% reduction in families, with reductions of 23.1% and 14.4% respectively in the 20 years to 2010. However, it is the figures regarding the involvement of children and young people in P.C.I. which are most remarkable and significant. Table 4.4 shows how new communicants, (who tend overwhelmingly to be young people), peaked numerically in the early 1960s. However a steady decline since then shows a reduction of 58.9% in 50 years, compared to a 21.1% reduction in general communicant church members

(table 4.5). This decline has accelerated, reducing by 28.9% in 20 years, the average lifetime of most of the subjects in this study. Although there may be some significant variation according to region, geographical area etc, hidden within these broad figures, the clear headline is that less young people are coming forward to become communicant members of P.C.I.

Year	1995	2000	2005	2010	15 year reduction (%)
Attendance at worship (am)	96,333	89,720	85,717	78,588	18.4%
Attendance at worship (eve)	22,650	20,131	19,542	18,452	18.5%
Persons who are aged 18 & under	63,050	54,767	49,106	42,872	32.0%

Table 4.6 Attendance at church worship services 1995-2010

Naturally, this is also reflected in the number of children and young people registered in formal Presbyterian Sunday organisations. The biggest decade of decline in numbers attending Sunday school and Bible class was in the 1980s, when over 21,000 fewer were on the rolls by 1990, a fall of one third. Table 4.5 shows how much more sharply these figures have fallen in comparison with the general Presbyterian population, a decrease of 69.3% in the past 50 years and of 43.7% in the past 20 years. This pattern is repeated when examining attendance at church worship services, (table 4.6). Although these statistics have only been available for since 1995, it can be seen how attendance at worship by under 18s is decreasing at almost double the rate of that of the Presbyterians of all ages.

Figure 4.1 shows how, expressed as a percentage of those attending in 1960, children and young people are declining more steeply than adults and families. Although much information is hidden within this statistic, the implications of losing nearly two thirds of the denomination's core young, even more rapidly than adults are lost, is very serious both now and for the future.

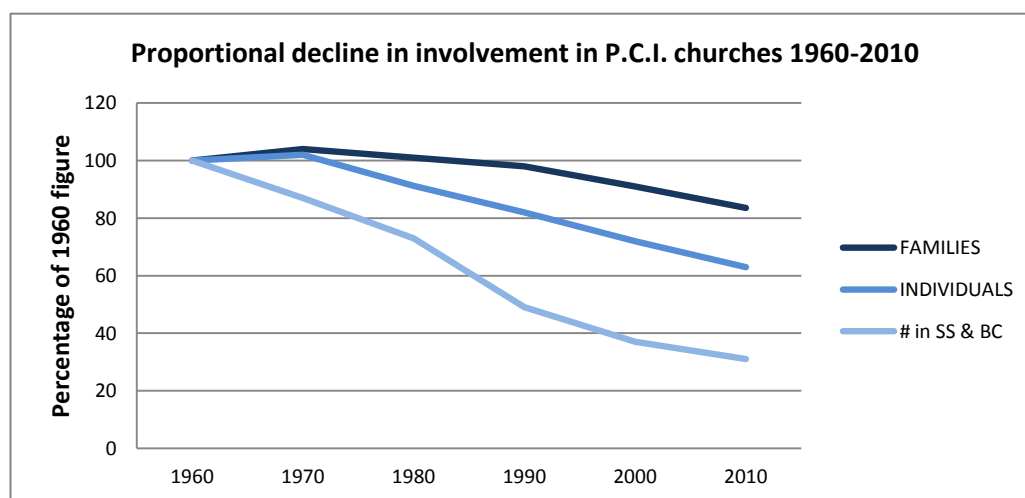


Figure 4.1 Attendance figures for up to 2010 based on a percentage of 1960 attendance

Figure 4.2 projects patterns if this decline continues at the same rate, suggesting less than 15,000 will attend Sunday schools and Bible classes in two decades time, which may be a somewhat optimistic prediction. Reasons behind fewer children and young people attending are unclear, though there may be a close correlation to parental patterns of behaviour; this may concern not just whether they take, or send, their children to Sunday school, but even more fundamental attitudes and behaviours which have serious implications for the future.

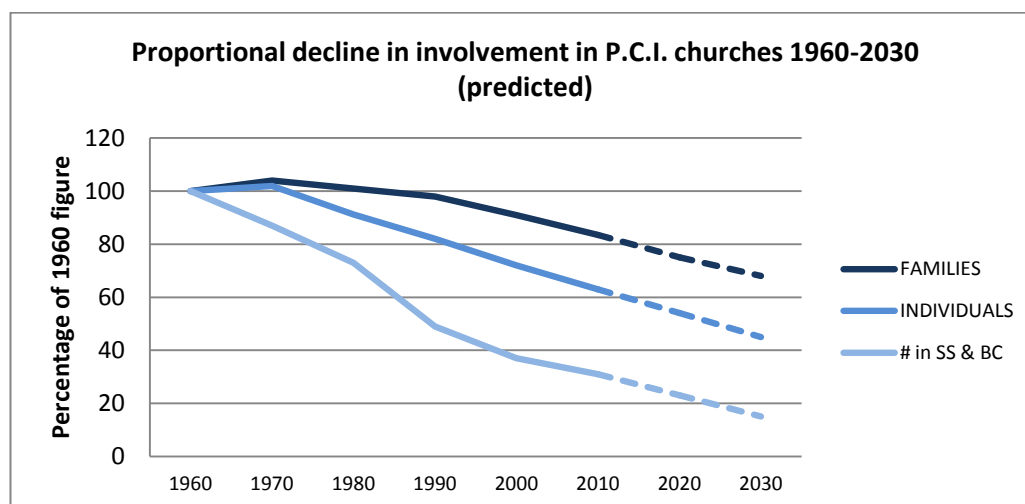


Figure 4.2 Predicted attendance figures for up to 2030 based on a percentage of 1960 attendance

As discussed in chapter 2, it is no longer the cultural norm for people, (especially Protestants) to baptise their children, and this is reflected in the steep decrease in numbers of infants baptised since the peak around the early 1960s (tables 4.4 and 4.5). In less than 50 years, the number of baptisms has fallen by almost three quarters, a very important indicator of what is to come. The biggest fall in baptismal numbers was in the 1990s and, although this may be levelling off somewhat, greatly decreased numbers of children coming in to the denomination at the bottom end will inevitably be reflected in adults' statistics as this century develops.

So, available statistics demonstrate a complex picture of decline and change and suggest that Northern Ireland is still significantly more religious than GB, but that attendance fall is more marked beyond school leaving age. Figures specific to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, however, show a steep decrease in attendance overall during the past three decades, but an even more significant decrease in numbers attending Sunday school and Bible class. All of these statistics are interesting and helpful to some extent, but say very little about the complexities of what is happening to young people growing up in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and even less about the reasons why they might stay or leave.

Reasons for decline

Like the decline in church attendance itself, the reasons for decline, especially amongst young people, have been uncontroversial until recently; however, questions are now being asked about apparent assumptions made by some academics and others about the patterns of church attendance among young people. As Uecker et al (2007, p.2) assert, 'Interest in religious decline in emerging adulthood has itself waned and become more of an assumption than a social phenomenon to be explored and explained.' As we have seen in the previous chapter, however, young people are growing up in a very different world and a very different way and this must be considered when examining patterns of religious adherence. It may be possible that there have been false assumptions about the reasons for numerical decline and associated false expectations of young people based on a failure to account for psycho-social changes in youth development. If so, perhaps these false foundations have added to the haemorrhage of the young from churches if reality is not met with effective practice. The remainder of this chapter will seek to identify accurate reasons for decreased church attendance and any consequences of this, so that implications for practice can be considered in the following chapter.

When seeking research to illuminate this question, useful recent related studies are mostly based in North America and the majority of this is on the population over 18 rather than adolescence, little specific attention paid to those aged 18-25. Smith et al highlight this as a major deficiency as 'Adolescence represents a crucial developmental transition from childhood to adulthood and so can disclose a tremendous amount of knowledge about religious socialization and change in the life course' (2002, p.597).

There is little UK data which does not already seem somewhat dated and the only relevant research in Northern Ireland is focussed on the development of attitudes to Christianity in secondary age pupils (Kay and Francis, 1996; Francis and Greer 1999; Francis et al 2006; Francis et al 2007). Francis has spent considerable time specifically examining the covert predisposition which underlies religious belief and behaviour, rather than the specific belief and behaviour itself (Francis 1993); he developed his 'Scale of Attitude towards Christianity' for use among 8-16 year olds (Francis, 1989a, 1989b) as an attempt to provide a common instrument to establish empirical comparability among different studies and it has been used in a large number of studies in this age group; Hills and Francis (2003) concluded that the Francis Scale is a selective measure of intrinsic religiosity.

The Francis Scale was further developed to a form that has been used with young adults and older adults (Francis et al 1995) for examining various aspects of attitude to Christianity

beyond school. However, although there has been some use of this scale in various regions of the world, and interesting studies on personality, science and family influence there seems to have been little or no longitudinal studies among 18-25s in the UK in the last 15 years regarding how attitudes to Christianity change over time. However, some of this research by Francis and associated academics gives valuable insight from various perspectives which will be referred to later in this chapter.

Around 18-25 is a key age for many reasons, not least that it is a phase of transition when key patterns of spiritual and religious behaviour and belief are formed and interactions with family, peers and community can be usefully examined with regard to long term religious adherence. Therefore, the research that *is* available will be used to frame an examination of how religious adherence or drift can be defined; there will then be consideration of suggested explanations for and influences on religious attendance patterns in order to identify salient practice issues to address young people leaving the church.

Defining church leaving

Conversations with ministers, youth workers and parents would demonstrate that most people have their own explanations about why young people stop attending church and what may or may not happen to them in the future. Some will assume they have been turned off by a church which is out of touch, others that they will come back when they want to get married, still others that they were never committed in the first place. It may not be correct, however, to assume that a lack of attendance equates to a lack of faith. Clergy or lay people may base their belief or even their ecclesiastical practice on unproven theory, but academic writing around the concept of young people leaving churches must be based on firm foundations. It is therefore vital that the concept of leaving is carefully examined and defined, but this is not a straightforward task.

“Church leaving is referred to by a variety of terms in the literature, including ‘disengagement’, ‘disaffiliation’, ‘deconversion’, ‘drifting’, ‘dropping out’, ‘exiting’ and ‘distancing’. Some of these terms presuppose a relatively high level of commitment to the religious institution; others make no such prior assumptions. Some terms presuppose that the church-leaving is predominantly an activity initiated by the church-leaver; others allow for the fact that the institution may share responsibility for the exit’ (Francis and Richter 2007, p.4)

Bromley (1998, p.23) highlights a debate over the concept of ‘disaffiliation’ because ‘conversion’ has been used to mean affiliation to a religion, but no parallel term for disaffiliation has been agreed. Brinkerhoff identifies four types of people in relation to church

attendance and leaving, arguing that there are important differences between them. Examining 'Apostates, Switchers, Converts and Stalwarts', Brinkerhoff and Burke are keen to point out that those who switch churches should not be treated as apostates (1980 p.51). They also stress that it is more important to define 'defection' as taking place when the individual stops identifying with something rather than when they stop being active or involved in it. Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) propose that apostasy is marked by disengagement with both community and belief. Haddoway and Roof (1998) distinguish between apostates 'those who had a religious identity at one time, but who now have rejected that identity' (29) and 'invisible affiliates' i.e. 'those who identify with some religion, but who rarely if ever attend religious services' (29)

Richter and Francis (1998) examine the difficulties in defining *church membership* and outlining the process of affiliation and disaffiliation. Using a base line of those who once attended at least six times per year (outside of Christmas and Easter), but who then lapsed below this frequency, they question whether decreased attendance can be explained by a corresponding decrease in commitment. They highlight that church leaving among young people cannot be attributed to general apathy, as that is not apparent in the wider societal context and they conclude that 'young people are willing to commit themselves, but not necessarily to traditional institutions such as churches' (1998, p.13). This leads them to question commentators like Bruce whom they quote from his 1995 book 'Religion in Modern Britain'; 'those who explain their lack of church involvement by considerations other than a lack of belief are fooling themselves or fooling the researchers' (in Richter and Francis 1998, p.27). In contrast, Bruce suggests the participants in their study gave biased responses which were 'shaded by politeness and guilt' (Bruce 'God is Dead: secularisation in the west' 2002, p.197 cited in Francis and Richter 2007, p.5)

So the defining lines of membership and attendance are blurred as is the validity of drawing any general conclusions. Richter and Francis ask if many in the UK who claim to 'believe without belonging' may have not had faith in an orthodox sense in the first place, (1998, p.38). Respondents in their study were often keen to point out that their church leaving should not be equated with loss of faith, (1998, p.36), but this was a factor much more likely to be cited by people aged under twenty than over twenty. Even in a Calvinist Irish Presbyterian context then, it may be dubious to equate physical absence from church with loss of faith.

An outreach worker to young people at a Belfast entertainment complex commented about how often young people say to him, 'I used to be a Christian'. What does such a statement mean? It could mean, 'I used to go to church' or 'I used to be *Good Living*', (Belfast slang for a

Christian lifestyle), or it could even mean 'I once publicly professed faith' or 'made a decision for Christ'. Depending on which of these states they might have had in mind, they may mean that they no longer go to church, or that their life looks very different externally to those who know them, or that they believe something different to what they once professed. Each of these represents broad points on a wide scale of faith expression and highlights the difficulty in measuring or expressing religious and spiritual commitment in young people.

The young people who talked to that outreach worker expressed, to some degree, no longer feeling they can legitimately call themselves a Christian. There may be complex or simple reasons for this, depending on what they mean by it, but it demonstrates that much of the research within the literature reviewed here is fraught with definitional issues. Identifying the reasons why young people stop attending church is a difficult task as it requires examination of a range of different circumstances, from those who were once forced to go by their parents but never had any faith, leaving as soon as they could, to those who had a strong faith to which they still hold, but no longer express that in a measurable public way. In fact, some of those young people in that Belfast entertainment centre, in a different context, may in fact call themselves a Christian, but suggest that 'I don't need to go to church to call myself a Christian' and may not be so called by those who know them, but may have a genuine faith.

Arnett and Jensen found that religious beliefs were more likely to be important to emerging adults than attendance at religious services, and that scepticism of religious institutions was related to negative experiences of church; 'Many expressed the view that they could be religious or spiritual on their own without institutional membership' (Arnett and Jensen, 2002, p.463). Returning to the question of 'believing without belonging', a concept examined notably by Davie (1990), there are many aspects to consider in relation to faith, practice and religious adherence. Bruce (2002) is critical of the notion that declining church attendance merely reflects the general civic engagement (the 'Decline of Associating' thesis made popular by, amongst others, David Putnam in his book 'Bowling Alone'). Bruce firmly concludes that non-attendance equates to non-belief and emphasises the doctrinal necessity for communal expression of faith. He also argues that empirical evidence demonstrates declining belief which 'shadows the decline in church adherence' (2002, p.326). Davie responds that those who 'believe without belonging' do so often in a very unorthodox manner. She points out that those who cease to attend church do so for a wide variety of reasons and describes 'a drifting away from the creedal or historic statements of faith...towards forms of belief with a stronger emphasis on immanence rather than on transcendence, on the God within rather than the God without – in other words, towards patterns that fit more easily into a culture dominated by consumption' (2002, p.332).

Gill also responds to Bruce, highlighting that although church attendance has declined due to a variety of social and physical factors, this has now *caused* decreased belief; 'it is precisely because people are no longer socialised within churches or Sunday schools that they find Christian beliefs, values and practices strange and implausible' (2002, p.337). Gill comments on the impact that the statement that 'you don't have to go to church to be a Christian' has had in producing indifference to church attendance, concluding that, as declined belief and affiliation are consequences rather than the cause of declined attendance, over-arching theories of socialisation or 'bowling alone' (2002, p.228) are not required. This helpfully acknowledges the need to not necessarily look for one linear pattern of cause and effect.

Voas (2009) points out that religious commitment is not dichotomous and that residual involvement is considerable, despite significant declines in conventional belief and practice. He calls this loyalty to tradition, without much overt commitment, 'fuzzy fidelity', merely a 'staging post in the road from religious to secular hegemony' (2009, p.167). However, we should be careful not to generalise; should churches, or researchers, make any assumptions about an individual's beliefs based on what they know of their external behaviour?

So, one should not assume that those who stop attending church, especially if they have once professed and demonstrated a Christian belief, no longer necessarily have that belief at least in some form. There must be distinction between those who never attended and those who have ceased, and between those who never believed and those who have lost or changed their beliefs. Jamieson (2002, 2006) sheds some light on this issue by extensive study of church leaders who cease connection with the local church. He identifies different categories of adult church leaver, the vast majority of whom spoke of 'a very clear and vivid experience of God at work in their lives' (2002, p.2). Many of these subjects still professed faith which was mostly found to be stable in a five year follow-up study (2006, p.81).

In assessing church leaving, what exactly is being measured? Uecker et al (2007) identify three types of decline in church attendance among young people: attendance at religious services, self report (on the importance of religion) and disaffiliation from religion. They find that only religious participation suffers substantial declines in young adulthood (70%) but that only 20% showed diminished religious importance and one in six disaffiliate from religion completely (2007, p.10). In this case, they defined disaffiliation as those who identified with religion at the start of the study but not in the final wave, seven years later, so there was recognition that religious adherence is not a simple dichotomy which is indicated by attendance or non-attendance at church. 'Young adults are vastly more likely to curb their attendance at religious

services than to alter how important they say religion is in their life or to drop their religious affiliation altogether' (Ueker et al 2007, p.15).

Bryant et al emphasise the difference between declining religious expression and declining spirituality, finding that first year university students in their study were less religiously active, but more spiritually committed. They highlight the importance of defining what is being measured and the need to understand the dynamics involved meaning that lack of certain behaviours may have not immediately obvious causes (2003, p.740). It may therefore be important to distinguish between religiosity and spirituality; however these terms are also complex, multifaceted and not easy to define. Both concepts have common elements, both can be private or communal for instance, so any definition may result in an unhelpful dichotomy (Hill et al 2000, King and Boyatzis 2004). Hill et al propose that any attempt to define religion and spirituality should clearly acknowledge that they both relate to the sacred and that they should not be polarised but should be seen as inherently intertwined.

Some may find it surprising even to ask the question of how to define these concepts differently; 'If young adults now consider spirituality something different from religion, that is troubling, at least to religious leaders' (Wuthnow 2007, p.131). In an attempt to examine how many could be said to be spiritual but not religious, Wuthnow found in his study that two thirds of those in their twenties chose personal experience over church doctrine as the best way to understand God (2007, p.133). Wuthnow also found a significant proportion of those who were uninvolved religiously but for whom spirituality was said to be important, though this was more prominent for those in their thirties than their twenties. He uses this evidence to support the idea of 'spiritual tinkering' which Wuthnow states is characteristic of a sizeable minority of young adults. Again, it is imperative that we keep in mind the specific nature of the developmental changes which may be influential in this process during young adulthood; Arnett (2004) highlights the common disconnect between religion and spirituality for young people of that age and developmental stage.

King and Boyatzis (2004, p.3) point out that studies show 'spirituality' tends to indicate a more personal and private expression of feelings and actions in relation to a transcendent entity, whereas 'religion' suggests engagement with an organised faith tradition. They refer further to how religious development can be seen as qualitative change in how an individual relates to a particular faith tradition or divine power; this 'may grow through affiliation with an organized faith tradition and participation in its prescribed rituals and contemplation of and adherence to its creeds' (2004, p.3). They also highlight a definition of spirituality as 'the search for, and relationship with, what one takes to be a holy or sacred transcendent entity' (2004, p.3).

Francis et al (2006) found that from 1968 to 1998 the number of 6th Form boys in Northern Ireland who said they prayed alone daily fell from 31% to 17% and girls who prayed alone daily fell from 46% to 24% in the same period. However, as with church attendance, they found no corresponding rise in those who said they never pray. In contrast, the same samples were asked if they read the Bible on their own and those boys who never do rose from 51% in 1968 to 60% in 1998, with girls rising from 39% to 46% in the same period.

In addition to private spiritual practice, expressed belief may also be an indicator of spirituality. Frances et al (2006) examined how belief in God and Jesus changed in their studies of 6th Year pupils in Northern Ireland. They found that the number of boys who said they completely believed in God rose from 33% in 1968 to 43% in 1988 and fell again to 36% in 1998, so was still higher than in 1968. Girls' belief also rose from 47% in 1968 to 58% in 1988 and then returned to 47% in 1998. During the same 30 year period, complete or partial disbelief remained very low. Again, it will be interesting to see if these figures changed significantly during the post Northern Ireland Agreement period, but up until 1998 there was still a steady underlying platform of belief in older teenagers in Northern Ireland. Thus 'religion' can be defined as outward, public forms of practice and spirituality as private practice and personal spiritual belief. These are not perfect definitions but will enable distinctions to be drawn.

Mason et al (2007a) used both attendance at religious services and other practices such as private prayer as measures of spiritual commitment, in addition to personal identification and belief. They found that regular and frequent prayer is associated with high levels of social concern and participation and that religious practice is more important than religious belief. McKinney and McKinney also examined the importance of personal prayer in college students and found their prayers to be highly revealing of their private domain.

So from the evidence presented here, it can be seen that the concept of young people leaving church can neither be neatly described nor measured. Religious decline is not a compact and coherent phenomenon but must be seen in terms of what Friedrich Schweitzer calls a 'multifaceted understanding of religious pluralisation and individualisation' (2000, p.98). This requires a close examination of the various factors that have been proposed as contributing to religious decline amongst the young in order to try to identify which are the most salient. Although outward decline in religious participation and church attendance can be observed in young adults, there is significant evidence that the impact on religious belief and values is much less; it may be that they are less religious but not as much less spiritual.

To define a young person's degree of attachment to church or Christian faith or even find a suitable label to describe it is therefore very problematic. Perhaps more general terms are

helpful in addressing dilemmas over terms as quoted at the start of this section. Francis and Richter (2007) suggest Félix Moser's term 'les distances de l'Eglise' (broadly, those who are 'distanced from the church') as a neutral and deliberately ambiguous term (Francis and Richter 2007, p.5). Although there is no helpful English equivalent, this concept allows for both active and passive absence from church and the notion of distance or closeness to church, both in terms of institution and deity, is one which may encapsulate the individuality of each person and the factors which may have influenced how near or far they are. Examining how near or far young people from the church or from God may therefore be a useful line of enquiry.

Why do young people leave the church?

Having argued for caution in defining the process and parameters of young people leaving church, the underlying question still needs to be asked: why do they leave, and what can be done by churches to try to address this process? One of the most commonly presented explanations is that of secularization, especially as it relates to the impact of higher education, and this will be examined along with other theories including the impact of transition and life cycle factors, the importance of family upbringing, lifestyle and cognitive dissonance. However, each of these explanations must be considered with caution, whilst being open to their potential to illuminate the process of leaving church.

Schweitzer (2000) suggests the reasons young adults leave the church are more complex than a straight choice between different explanatory theories. 'Any adequate understanding of the religious changes in late adolescence and early adulthood must move beyond the abstract opposition of secularisation versus life cycle effects, both theoretically and empirically' (p.98). Therefore some less 'conventional' influences on church leaving will be considered, and the chapter will then conclude by reframing the question in the contemporary context.

Secularization and the impact of Higher Education

This area has long been a popular focus of research into young people leaving church. The general hypothesis states that during higher education young people become more secular as their minds become broadened while their time and attention turns to a wider range of activities, all of which loosens their connection to church attendance and faith itself. It would generally be accepted that high proportion of young people within the Presbyterian Church go on to some form of higher education, although there appears to be no specific data to support this. The geographic nature of Northern Ireland means that a significant numbers of young people leave Northern Ireland to attend institutions in England or Scotland and may never

return; many others move from their local area to attend Queen's University or the University of Ulster and may also not settle back at home.

Table 4.7 shows that, consistently, over a third of applicants to UK institutions who originally lived in Northern Ireland are accepted by institutions in Great Britain, in addition to those who travel to Higher Education in the Republic of Ireland. The proportion of Northern Ireland domiciled students studying in English institutions notably increased during the past decade.¹⁹ The levels of Christian support through Christian Unions and others such bodies in G.B. may not be what many young people are used to, especially in England where Christian Unions may be smaller and evangelical churches fewer. Even for those staying at home, although the Christian Union at Queen's is by far the biggest in the UK, some propose that student life takes its toll not just on the attendance of young people at their home church, but on their faith itself. There is a lack of local research on this however, which means there is uncertainty about how many post secondary young people who may have a church connection or have even professed faith at some stage, still hold that faith, however tentatively.

N. Ireland	8,184	8,451	8,698	9,370	8,049	8,583	9,010	9,296	8,832	8,641	-2%
England	2,171	2,613	2,833	3,174	2,995	3,203	3,214	3,117	3,430	3,861	+13%
Wales	93	92	107	109	110	101	109	117	169	217	+28%
Scotland	1,548	1,302	1,240	1,257	1,231	1,114	1,097	1,071	1,076	1,073	0%
TOTAL	11,996	12,458	12,878	13,910	12,385	13,001	13,430	13,601	13,507	13,792	+2%

Table 4.7: Total number of NI domiciled applicants to UK Institutions by country of institution in 2002 – 2008

Source: N.I.S.R.A. 2007 / D.E.L.N.I.(2011)

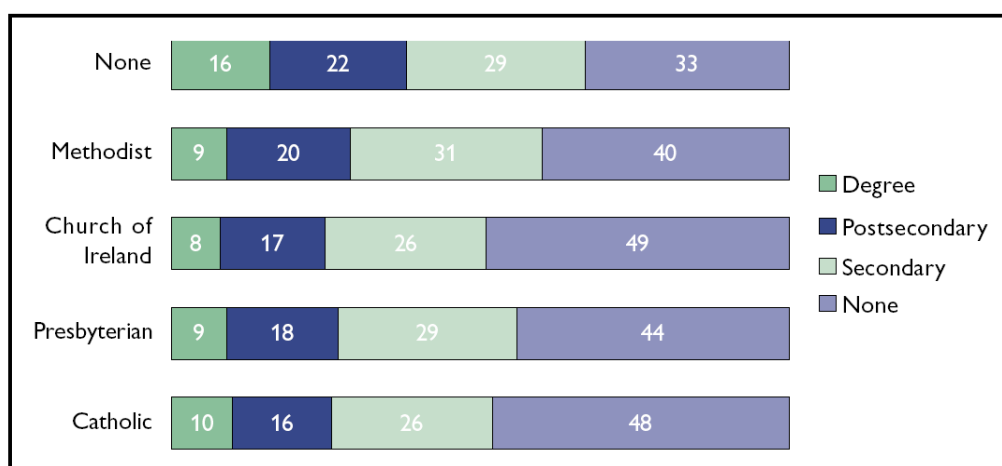
Cairns (2008) found that some young people in his study expressed a 'need to move' or an expectation that it would benefit them personally or professionally. 'Via the use of mobility, young people can be liberated from the limitations of place of origin, particularly in terms of available opportunities for jobs and lifestyles' (Cairns 2008, p.243).

The so called 'brain-drain' from Northern Ireland has implications for post study as those who move away from home are more likely to stay away compared with those who first studied there. Of those 2,195 Northern Ireland domiciled students who completed undergraduate degrees in GB in 2005/6, only 25.51% returned to employment in Northern Ireland (23% of males), whereas of those 5,410 Northern Ireland domiciled students who completed undergraduate degrees in Northern Ireland the same year, nearly 67% then gained

¹⁹ However the number of NI domiciled full-time first year undergraduate enrolments at UK HEIs decreased by 5%, from 14,080 in 2009/10 to 13,440 in 2010/11 (N.I.S.R.A. 2012).

employment in Northern Ireland and around another 10% enrolled in further study within Northern Ireland (N.I.S.R.A. 2007). With the clear differences in ultimate destination after study, this research will consider whether those who stay within Northern Ireland are more likely to retain a church connection than peers who remain away from home.

McAllister (2005) examines this issue using 2001 Census data (figure 4.3) suggesting that the influence of education on religious affiliation is modest; it is striking, however, that although denominational differences are slight, those with no religious affiliation are proportionately much less likely to have no qualifications and considerably more likely to have a degree. These statistics tell us nothing about cause or direction however, and the impact of higher education requires more than simply examining qualification levels but requires a detailed understanding of the experience of higher education impacts on the individual.



Figures are the percentage of respondents with each level of qualification for each denomination

Figure 4.3 Educational qualifications and religion in Northern Ireland (McAllister 2005)

Research which has been carried out worldwide in this area is conflicting and inconclusive. Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977) referred to higher education as a 'breeding ground for apostasy' and after several researchers examined and tested this hypothesis, others more recently have simply assumed it to be true. Pascarella and Terenzini's study indicated a general decline in students overall religiousness and religious participation during college years (1991, P.724). Hadaway and Roof found college attendance to be a leading predictor of decreased religious practice as 'younger, liberal, and highly educated respondents and those who accept values associated with the so-called new morality were all more likely to apostatize' (1988, P.45). Smith and Sikkink (2003) also found educational attainment to be one of several predictors of religious attainment and switching, but not the most important one. James Hunter argued that it is a 'well-established fact that education, even Christian education, secularizes' (1983,

p.132 cited in Regnerus and Ueker 2007, p.3). However, such confident claims have become much more contentious in the light of a wave of more recent studies.

Other researchers have described more complex patterns, with religious or spiritual activity found to remain the same or even increase in the years after leaving school (De Haan and Schulenberg 1997; Lee 2002; Levkowitz 2005). Brinkerhoff and Mackie question the role of higher education in predicting church leaving, suggesting such an approach misses the detail of the process; 'Given the similarity of student and community patterns, we argue that viewing apostasy as an inherent and ephemeral aspect of university experience leaves most of the process unexplained' (1993, p.252). Hunsberger (1978) found little support for the idea that students become less religious due to university attendance but consistent data showed senior students reported less frequent church *attendance* compared to first years. Hoge et al (1993) found overall no impact of higher education on future church attendance; 'the amount of formal education and involvement in campus Christian groups had no predictive power for church involvement today' (p.247). Arnett and Jensen (2002, p.458) also found no variation in church attendance by the educational level of emerging adults. Lee (2002) even found more students experiencing strengthening of faith than weakening, and that religious service attendance *leads to* stronger personal religious beliefs and convictions, when attending with peers who frequently attend religious services especially strengthening beliefs (Lee 2002, p.382). O'Connor et al also found no impact of cultural broadening from higher education or any other adult experiences in how it influenced religious or spiritual patterns (2002, p.731).

There may also be differences depending on a variety of factors such as gender. Bryant (2007b) found a negative association between the spirituality of male students and both the number of hours per week they spent studying and whether or not they studied scientific subjects; this association with spirituality was not found in female students.

Cassidy and Trew's study of Northern Ireland students (2004) found life transitions such as starting university to have low to moderate change across five identities (family member, friend, student, nationality, and religion), but as this focussed on identity rather than belief or practice, it is of limited usefulness in this discussion. However, a number of studies highlight that there is no easy framework for understanding this phenomena and that behaviour and belief are not necessarily synonymous.

Bryant et al (2003, p.736) studied 3,680 students over a wider area of USA and found them to be less religiously active after their first year at university, (indicated by decreased attendance at religious services, praying or meditating and discussing religion), but more committed to integrating spirituality into their lives. Lee also states that 'students may engage in less church

attendance and observance of the Sabbath but may still hold strong convictions about being 'spiritual' and may develop more tolerance of multiple religious faiths compared to their beliefs when they first entered college' (2002, p.382). Three quarters of the university students studied by Rew et al (2007, p.67) said their religious and spiritual beliefs had not changed, but the way they had put them into practice was different.

Lefkowitz (2005, p.59) found the most common behavioural change among emerging adults after their transition to university was less frequent attendance at religious services but the most commonly described spiritual change was a stronger sense of faith; no student specifically mentioned rejecting their religion. Clydesdale (2007a, 2007b) claims to shed some light on these issues with his concept of the 'identity lockbox' in which they temporarily store beliefs and values, as an explanation as to why college students religious activity and beliefs may seem incongruent. 'The real issue is not how many college students check off "an interest in spirituality" but how many actualize that interest in their everyday priorities' (2007a). In his grounded qualitative study he found that students at the end of their first year had almost identical spiritual and religious beliefs, which have been preserved but often showed little impact in their daily lives.

'The enemy of developing critical thinking, creative engagement, and social awareness among college students is therefore not students' possession of religious identities—it is their widespread use of identity lockboxes. So, too, the enemy of a thoughtful and lasting religiosity among college students is not their pursuit of college education, but their widespread use of identity lockboxes.' (Clydesdale 2007a, p.6)

Ueker et al (2007) also suggest that it is the college experience rather than college itself which is corrosive to faith and that the impact is only on those students who already had a higher risk of losing their faith when they first arrived. The impact of higher education on today's young adults may have changed from those of a generation ago due to student values changing from those which led to challenging their religious upbringing to now more of a concern for financial and economic security. Ueker et al propose that universities are no longer hostile to religion per se, citing Cherry et al (2001, *Religion on Campus*, University of North Carolina Press) who describe universities, (in contrast to Caplovitz's 'breeding ground for apostasy' of three decades earlier) as now 'a breeding ground for vital religious practice and teaching'.

In their research, Ueker et al found that although religious decline varies by educational level, in all three types of religious decline, (attendance, personal importance and disaffiliation), 'it is the respondents who *did not go to college* who exhibit the highest rates of diminished religiosity' (2007, p.11). Ueker et al stand firmly in the face of what they suggest has been 'assumed logic', and argue that higher education does not secularise students; the seeds of

secularisation may have been planted long before university, though church attendance may only fall at this stage.

Within Northern Ireland, although indications of rapid secularisation have increased greatly since the 'Good Friday Agreement', the literature examined here gives reason to suggest that lack of church attendance amongst young people should not necessarily be taken as an indication of a secular outlook or a loss of faith. Patterns of faith and religious observance are more individual and complex; as lack of church attendance is not necessarily a sign of lack of belief, causes of church leaving appear to be more circumstantial.

Changing freedom and responsibility

The most common reasons given by young adult Presbyterians to Hoge et al (1993) for stopping attending church were 'too busy' and 'left home'. Similarly, Smith and Denton (2005) found passive factors to be the major cause of religious decline. Ueker et al (2007) claim that it is not higher education which secularises young people, but the freedoms young adults experience at this stage of life which allow them to loosen or break the ties with formal religious expression. Almost half of those surveyed by O'Connor et al who became inactive said they did so for personal or motivational reasons such as 'being too busy,' 'busy with family obligations,' 'lack of interest,' and 'feeling bored or lazy;' (2002, p.727). More passive factors can be at work in emerging opportunities after leaving compulsory education.

'Adolescents simply lose interest, just stop going to church, or are incapable of providing a reason altogether....we assert that these passive rationales are prominent in early adulthood. Emerging adulthood brings with it a host of responsibilities (e.g. work, school) and opportunities (e.g. increased autonomy) that simply and subtly crowd out religious participation' (Ueker et al 2007, p.19).

It is important that we consider that some young adults may simply find that church connections have been pushed down their agenda and, the longer that happens the harder it may be to reconnect. This may also be salient when there is a lack of opportunity for religious expression, as highlighted by Powell and Kukiak (2005) who found that one of the biggest issues raised by college students in their survey was difficulty in finding a church or faith community when studying away from home. Bryant et al found that 'diminished capacity to engage in reflective practices (e.g. religious service attendance, prayer / meditation) may create a spiritual void for students as they begin college and are away from home for the first time, particularly if these practices were central aspects of their family life' (2003, p.740).

Lifestyle and cognitive dissonance

Another specific circumstantial factor often suggested as an influence on young adults leaving church is when they find themselves in a situation of cognitive dissonance, when their behaviour does not match what they believe it ought to be. As this life stage offers more opportunities than exist when teenagers, especially if living at home, this can lead to a gap between what they are doing and what they believe they 'should' be doing. This could include use of alcohol and drugs, extra-marital sex and co-habitation. Albrecht et al (1988) found this to be significant for young Mormons who stopped attending 'because their lifestyle was no longer compatible with participation in the church' (cited in Ueker et al 2007, p.4).

Francis and Richter (2007, p.158) found that lifestyle issues were referred to more frequently by young people than older as significant in church leaving. 17% of those who left before they were 20 cited sex before marriage as a reason for their disengagement, when they came to feel uncomfortable in church. Others left due to similar discomfort because they were in same-sex relationships or taking substances.

The evidence for this line is uncertain; Hoge et al (1993, p.247) found that 'counterculture experiences had little association with church-related behaviour today'; although some of the variables used for this (smoking marijuana and attending rock concerts) might not be the most 'rebellious', only 3% of those young adult Presbyterians who had stopped attending cited reasons of substance use or sexual activity. Ueker et al found modest support for a normative deviance explanation; however, they did find that maintaining virginity into young adulthood reduces the chance that the individual will decrease attendance at church services, though this again may be effect rather than cause. Being in an environment of incongruence has been suggested to be potentially a positive thing for faith development, however.

"Young adulthood represents a defining moment in the development of an authentic, self-authored faith or worldview. For evangelical students, the process of faith development involves probing the universality of the truth claims that their tradition embraces and undergoing points of crisis and struggle. The college years represent a unique period of exposure to context that challenge, disorient, and problematize absolutes, and as such prime students for the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual struggles that may serve as the precursors to a faith that is deliberately constructed and owned" (Bryant 2007a, p.7).

Life course

Life course factors are also of interest in the sense of considering how the current life situation of the individual is related to his or her religious observance. Although many attend church and are involved in spiritual activity on a reasonably constant basis, this can vary according to life cycle and situation. O'Connor et al describe dropping out of church attendance and

returning later as 'the norm' (2002, p.731); they reassessed the sample from Hoge and Petrillo (1978) and found that 79% of those surveyed had dropped out of church at some time and 56% had returned within the 22 years between the studies. As only 46% of the original sample were surveyed, it seems reasonable to suggest that those who were not re-interviewed were at least as likely to drop out if not more so, though perhaps less likely to return.

In the context of the above discussion about incongruent behaviour, Ueker et al found that co-habitation was linked with each of their three types of religious decline, and had an independent effect on attendance at public worship, even when sexual behaviour was taken into account (2007, p.19). This may be because of the public element of this behaviour, as the individual may not be willing to be seen where they believe they will be judged or looked down upon, or it may be a sign that if they are prepared to cross a public boundary with certain behaviours if they have also ceased holding to church teaching to a significant extent and so co-habitation significantly lowers the likelihood of church attendance (Stolzenberg 1995).

This is of particular interest in Northern Ireland, where attitudes are still somewhat conservative compared with other regions in the UK. Young people who are involved in more obvious forms of behaviour that are at odds with church teaching (such as co-habitation or a same sex relationship) may be much more likely than those whose behaviour might be more easily hidden from significant adults, (such as weekend drinking or extra-marital sex).

In contrast, marriage among young adults has a positive impact on church attendance and retaining religious commitment (Ueker et al 2007); conversely, those who never marry may be more likely to leave the church (Hadaway and Roof 1998). The impact of parenthood was found to increase likelihood of church attendance by some (Wilson and Sherkat 1994) but have no impact in other studies (Ueker et al 2007). Wilson and Sherkat (1994) found life transition, especially marriage, to have a more significant impact for men than women by; however, they also point out the need for caution when attributing positive (or negative) cause to life course transitions, as the impact may be due to other broader factors which might be associated with that stage. Some of the emerging adults who had left church in Arnett and Jensen's study saw their unchurched status as temporary until they had children and of the quarter of the sample who were already parents, many were already inspired to return to church (2002, p.462).

"Those with strong ties to their family of origin and who form families of their own relatively early run less risk of dropping out of the church. There seems little doubt that the family is a commitment mechanism for the church" (Wilson and Sherkat 1994, p.158).

Family

A variety of studies over several years have highlighted some degree of importance to the impact of family in religious socialisation and enduring church connection, (e.g. Bao et al 1999; deVaus 1983; Eaves et al 2008; Hunsberger and Brown 1986; Myers 1996). Bryant et al (2003, p.738) found that family ties and unity related to both religiousness and spirituality, showing that regular family contact was a predictor of strong spirituality and experiencing divorce or separation was a predictor of religious regressions. Hoge et al (1993) found parental church attendance had a weak impact on young adults' current church involvement, whereas an earlier study of high school youth found strong family association (Hoge and Petrillo 1978). Francis and Gibson (1993) found that parental influence was important to the religious attitudes in both sexes in 11-12 and 15-16 year olds and that fathers' influence was weaker than mothers', especially over daughters.

In the Northern Ireland context, McAllister (2005) found that Catholics and those with no religion who were most likely to pass their religious outlooks on to their children; Protestant children kept the family religion at much lower levels, though Presbyterians fared better than the other major Protestant denominations, with 74% of those from a Presbyterian background keeping the faith of their parents. These calculations are taken from the 2001 Northern Ireland census and it will be interesting to see what patterns emerge from the 2011 census, given the increased levels of secular behaviour in the region.

The pattern is not straightforward, however; Ploch and Hastings (1998) found that, although parents' attendance (especially same sex parent) had a significant impact on church attendance in later life, salience of religion was a much more powerful factor. Others have questioned whether the impact is significant or simple (De Haan and Schulenberg 1997) found that within their sample of college students, an acceptance of parental beliefs was not indicative of a strong religious faith. Nearly two thirds of Arnett and Jensen's survey (2002) had high exposure to religious socialization, but there was not a statistically significant relationship between childhood religious socialisation and current religious attendance or beliefs. They suggest that this is 'a reflection of their individualism and of their resolve to think for themselves and form their own beliefs' but surely it is not enough to suggest that independent thought will necessarily lead to different behaviour.

The general context and nature of the spiritually nurturing experience may also be significant. A number of other studies suggest that warm encouragement rather than coercion is more likely to encourage future attendance (Hoge et al 1993; Strommen and Hardel 2000; Lytch

2004) and Francis and Richter similarly concluded that compulsion is counterproductive and warn of the dangers of 'an inoculation for life against future church attendance' (2007, p.124).

Thus the specific quality of the home relationship is a significant factor, as those who have a warm, close relationship with their parents are shown in some studies to share their religious beliefs (Wilson and Sherkat 1994; Hoge and Petrillo 1978). Warm, caring behaviours from parents predicted strong religious commitment when the children entered adulthood in Dudley and Wisbey's study (2000) and the mother's influence in this way also predicted regularity in attendance at worship. The quality of family relationships was found to be influential in religious and spiritual behaviour in other studies (Myers 1996; Friedman and Weissbrod 2004; Smith and Denton 2005; Milevsky and Leh 2008).

Bao et al (1999), Dudley and Dudley (1986) and Hunsberger and Brown (1984) found a somewhat stronger religious influence of mothers over youth than fathers and Bao et al also found the mother's influence on sons to be especially strong. Kay (1981) found that children from homes where the parents had divorced had low attitudes to religion; children from separated parents had high attitudes to religion. Studies also show that religiosity of individuals with a secure history is relatively strongly positively linked to the religiosity of their parents (Granqvist, 1998; Granqvist and Hagekull 1999, 2002; Kirkpatrick and Shaver 1990).

Religion is a social phenomenon and is typically practiced in relation to, as well as often in the company of, other persons but few studies have considered the direct or indirect influence of the social context. (Regnerus et al 2004, p.27); they considered a unique set of information collected from adolescents, parents, friends, and school administrators, what Rambo labelled the 'microcontext', or local setting, for the development of religiosity, the 'more immediate world of a person's family, friends, ethnic group, religious community, and neighbourhood' (Rambo, L. R. (1993) in Regnerus et al 2004, p.28).

Their study showed that parents continued to be the primary influence in shaping their children's church attendance habits but also that attendance was lower if the subject's friends' attendance patterns were low. Parents were found to influence how important religion is to their children, but less than they influence attendance, something over which many parents still maintain at least some control. Parents can influence what friendships or schools their children are influenced by and which may be likely to share common religious values or practices. (Regnerus et al 2004). Regnerus et al encourage an ecological approach to the study of religious development in youth, one that considers understanding the multiple social contexts in which youth live as essential to research on adolescent religion and spirituality.

Other issues

Bryant (2007b, p.842) found engagement in prayer to predict how spiritual men rated themselves to be more so than it did with women and that spiritual struggle was more likely to impair women's spiritual self-assessments than men's. Religious identity seems more strongly linked to men's spirituality than women's; 'a specifically Christian religious identity serves as the conduit through which men come to express their spiritual selves and a backbone that provides structure and definition to what is amorphous and undefined' (Bryant 2007b, p.844). Considerable empirical evidence suggests that girls are generally more religious than boys (King et al 2002, cited in Regnerus et al 2004) or have a higher faith maturity than boys (Martin et al 2003).²⁰ Smith et al (2002, p.605) examined data sets from various studies and concluded that American adolescent girls are more involved in religious activities than are boys.

Francis and Wilcox (1996) used the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity among children and young people (Francis, 1989b) as well as among adults (Francis, 1992a) to confirm that women record higher scores on indices of religiosity than men. The data supports the view that higher levels of religiosity are a function of gender orientation rather than a function of being female, as both men and women who possess a feminine rather than a masculine outlook tend to be more religious. Their sample was of students who were 86% aged under 30 and 28% aged 18 and 19 so these findings can be seen to be relevant to emerging adults. Henderson et al (2007, p.116) found significant evidence from the narratives of young people of the role of women 'passing on the faith' and taking an active part within the church; mothers and grandmothers were especially seen as 'guardians of the faith'. Whether this is being passed on to daughters and granddaughters was somewhat less evident, however.

Not all the literature is in agreement on the issue of gender and religion. Feltey et al (1991) found that gender differences in religiosity were not supported when other demographic variables were considered. However, they did conclude that women did have higher levels of church attendance and also expressed greater levels of the religious dimension of intimacy, as measured by closeness to God, while gender ideology is not related to intimacy with God.

In a study of Christians, Muslims, Jews and Hindus in the UK, only Christian women reported slightly higher levels of religious activity than men, whereas women in the other three religious groups reported distinctly lower levels of religious activity than men (Loewenthal et al 2002, p.138). On the basis of this, they contest what they call the 'over-general conclusion that women are more 'religious' than are men' (2002, p.138), concluding that differences are likely

²⁰ See also De Vaus (1987) and Barry and Nelson (2005, 2008).

to be specific to a particular religion and particular aspects of religious activity, rather than a measure of cognitive and emotional aspects of religion. Francis et al (2007) reported that in Northern Ireland sex differences in attitude toward Christianity have remained stable, that is, girls have reported a more favourable attitude than boys within both school systems.

With regard to other variables, although sectarian factors are important in a Northern Ireland context, this research will be focussed on Presbyterian Churches so they are not especially relevant.²¹ The influence of political identity is not one which can be dismissed totally, however. McAlister (2005) points out, using 2001 Census data, that those who profess no religion are overwhelmingly more likely than Catholics or Protestants to reject a Unionist or Nationalist identity. The young people interviewed from Northern Ireland in Henderson et al's study (2007) frequently interpreted a question on religion as having a political or sectarian meaning. The changing political landscape of Northern Ireland during the past decade might lead to decreased political adherence and decreased religious adherence may continue to be linked, but it is not possible to establish if there is a causal link between religious and political affiliation or in which direction it might be. It appears that religious affiliation and identity will continue to be a significant issue with young people in Northern Ireland, regardless of how committed they are to church attendance, practice or belief (Hayes and McAllister, 2009).

The influence of racial difference is only beginning to be felt in Northern Ireland, though is an important phenomena in churches in Eire and something to bear in mind for future studies. The class based division and rural / urban or regional differences in young people's experience of church and church leaving are worth consideration. Perhaps more young people from rural congregations, especially in the west of Northern Ireland, would be inclined to drift from their church of origin, if not the church altogether, but there appears to be no specific data available on this. Unfortunately there is no data available in relation to class issues in P.C.I.

Finally, geographical or regional differences should be acknowledged. Henderson et al found the most defined intergenerational decline in religious faith in the rural setting (2007, p.114). It is the inner city churches in P.C.I. which are numerically in greatest decline, but consideration should be given in this study to some of the transitional and mobility issues which particularly affect young people from the rural areas of Northern Ireland, as discussed in the section on Higher Education.

Having considered all these issues, none can be dismissed as irrelevant, but neither is there clear insight on this research question or in predicting the future faith journey of young

²¹ Some young people from, for none -Presbyterian backgrounds, e.g. Catholics, do of course, attend Presbyterian youth groups.

people. Most significantly the literature indicates in the widest sense that different social factors influence different groups of people in diverse religious traditions in dissimilar ways (Smith and Sikkink 2003, p.200). Similarly, Hughes et al suggest from their research into Australian young adults that 'in general, personal circumstances played a larger role than problems with churches or issues of faith' and 19% saw dropping out as merely 'part of growing up and making one's own decisions' (2000, p.188).

Rew et al conclude from their study that it is not possible to neatly identify issues and influences but that 'religion and spiritual beliefs and behaviours are complex phenomena. Researchers interested in this topic should explore participant's views of being religious or spiritual rather than using composite scores to measure beliefs' (2007, p.67). Thus, it is concluded from the literature examined that whereas factors such as education, changing freedoms, life course, lifestyle and family background may have a significant impact on young people's religious outcomes, there are not simple trends and each individual may have their own complex set of circumstances. Perhaps then there are other less conventional variables which may help to explain the impact on the individual.

Changes and new explanations

Each one of the variables and issues examined has been shown to be important but not defining; therefore it is important to consider aspects of religiosity which are contextual, reflecting the changing nature of adolescence and the social environment in which young people are growing up. It is particularly important to note that, with the variety of often conflicting evidence presented so far, mostly emerging from the North American context, it is difficult to come to firm conclusions which can be applied to a Northern Irish context. Instead, it might be important to consider some of the important factors which acknowledge the uniqueness of each individual, open to a variety of different forces and influences in different ways. What current issues emerge as being the most important to consider in developing a strategy to keep young adults in the church?

Today's context: acknowledging the overlooked

The previous chapter proposed that changes in western culture and the way in which young people develop psycho-socially and spiritually are very important in understanding their patterns of religious faith. Changes in life may require the identification of other explanations and patterns beyond the more traditional ones already examined.

Much of this research into patterns of those aged 18 and over has been carried out in USA with little equivalent study in UK, Europe or other parts of the world. However, the use of the Francis scale of attitude towards Christianity has been a useful tool numerous times in various contexts and has allowed comparison on questions of changes in religiosity in childhood and adolescence, the causes or antecedents of change and any consequences and associations of change (Kay and Francis 1996). Studies show no association between religious decline and developmental stages in childhood and adolescence (e.g. Goldman, relying on Piaget, suggested children moving to more abstract thinking would reject faith) but rather that, even in Northern Ireland there was a consistent and persistent religious decline. However, Kay and Francis suggest that any conflict is explained by modern British society's slide into religious indifference: 'Growing up means becoming indifferent to religion' (1996, p.31).

Richter and Francis examined differences of attitude toward religion in different generations, specifically those labelled 'Baby Boomers' (born post war, pre 1960s) and 'Generation X' (born in the 1960s and 70s); they characterise the former as wanting 'something that would fit them, rather than something into which they would have to fit' and 'GenXers' (or Baby Busters) were characterised as people who believe that 'where people stand is less important than how they feel' (1998, pp.41,49).

'For this generation church leaving is unlikely to be merely a case of teenage rebellion...Church leaving will have to do with Baby Busters' suspicion of easy answers; their scepticism towards 'hype' and manipulation; their unwillingness to be treated as passive consumers; their hunger to have all their senses satisfied; their desire to 'be their own person', in their own style, rather than simply to follow the crowd or the dictates of denominational tradition' (Richter and Francis 1998, pp.49-50).

In the ten years since this work was published, it is those known as 'Generation Y' or 'Millennials', born in the 1980s and 90s, who are the focus of these generational questions. What are the characteristics of this generation which are relevant to the reasons they may or may not leave the church?

Kay and Francis also considered issues of generational attitudes and influence on reasons for leaving, finding that 'pupils' concepts of God, the Bible, Jesus, school religion, church and prayer related to each other in pupils' minds in the same way in 1994 as they did in 1974' (1996, p.39), which legitimises direct comparisons across the 20 year period. They proposed from such comparisons that there is no evidence of a sudden rejection of Christianity in the unchurched population, but a gradual erosion of attitudes; 'religious involvement is simply not a priority among this generation of young adults' (Ueker et al 2007, p.20).

"As young people leave the world of childhood, they are absorbed incrementally into the world of adulthood. Today much of the world of adulthood is characterized by the

secular rather than by the religious...The socialization process is persistently and inevitably drawing young people into the ethos of that post-Christian world. In this sense, to be irreligious is to be normal. The challenge facing the churches today is that of making the gospel message heard among young people in a radically alien social environment” (Kay and Francis 1996, p.144)

These ideas are developed specifically in the literature which reflects on the stretching of adolescence, as examined in chapter 3, and how developmental changes, identity formation and transition to adulthood impact on their religious experiences. The concept of emerging adulthood is important regarding its impact on religious development; transition to adulthood has been demonstrated to be an important stage when religious values, beliefs and attitudes can be formed and changed (e.g. Arnett and Jensen 2002; Koenig et al 2008; Nelson 2005).

“Although the identity development process begins during adolescence (Erikson, 1968), the quest for self-definition of one’s values and beliefs including those in the religious or spiritual domain ensues during the late teens and early twenties, particularly among those in industrialized countries who postpone entry into adult roles of marriage and parenthood” (Nelson 2009, p.3).

Arnett and Jensen found that emerging adults have highly individualised religious beliefs and values, forming their own unique set of religious beliefs rather than accepting a ready-made dogma; ‘emerging adults often combined concepts and practices from different religious and nonreligious traditions in unique, highly individualized ways’ (2002, p.459). For many in this study, individualised religious expression meant priority of belief over attendance at religious services; ‘Many expressed the view that they could be religious or spiritual on their own without institutional membership’ (2002, p.463).

Mason et al (2007) found Generation Y Australians to be both reluctant to declare that any one religion is true, and a majority from all denominations agreed that it was ‘okay to pick and choose your religious beliefs’. Many of the Emerging Adults interviewed by Arnett (2004) were found to have diverse beliefs, often comprising a variety of different religions ranging from Christianity and Buddhism to the Force in Star Wars!

If this is true, it may shed some light on some of the patterns which have been highlighted so far, in that young adults’ outward behaviour may not reflect the beliefs one might immediately assume. Perhaps for an age group which is still forming their identity, including their religious identity, if there is a complex mix of factors at work there may still be a greater openness to religious engagement than might be expected. ‘Forming one’s own beliefs and values is part of the process of identity formation in an individualistic culture and part of the process of becoming an adult’ (Arnett and Jensen 2002, p.464). Although religious participation may be low, young adults may still claim religious membership and Arnett and Jensen highlight how important their religious beliefs continue to be to them. If the need for independent belief

and values is a key factor at work in the continuing process of transitioning to adulthood, non attendance can never be assumed to equate to lack of interest.

“For the most part, they have concluded that at this time of their lives their beliefs are best observed not through regular participation in a religious institution with other, like-minded believers, but by themselves in the privacy of their own hearts and minds, in a congregation of one” (Arnett and Jensen 2002, p.465).

One of the key aspects of Arnett’s theory of Emerging Adulthood is that, in order to become an adult, young people must establish three pillars of identity which includes not only love and work, but an ideology or world view (2004, p.165). He points out that the process of forming this world view is not complete for most people until after adolescence and ‘it is during emerging adulthood that people address worldview questions most directly...Few people enter emerging adulthood at age 18 with a well-established world view, but few people leave their twenties without one, just as few people leave their twenties without a definite direction in love and work’ (2004, p.166).

With little or no contradictory evidence or argument to this, churches should not see young adults who are drifting from core external religious expression as having reached the end of the road, nor should they expect these young adults to be spiritually mature at 18. Instead, there must be better understanding of how this stage of life causes the reframing of outlook and priorities so that they can be helped to either keep or return to church connection. Thus, ‘les distances de l’Eglise’ may be embraced and supported in a different way, with the priority to keep a strong connection rather than necessarily a strong commitment.

Kay and Francis (1996) suggest that the issue of relevance is vital to holding the membership of young people and the need to understand ‘irrelevance’ as seen by young people is a key to understanding the drift from churches. This issue was seen to be much more significant to young people by Francis and Richter (2007) as 37% of those under 40 associated their disengagement with church to a view that it is ‘old fashioned’ and 51% of the same age group said they were bored with church. Also, 46% of those in their study who left before their 20th birthday said they did so because church teaching was irrelevant to everyday life (Francis and Richter 2007, p.233). Patterns of religious service attendance over time were shown to be quite different from other clubs by Good et al (2008) and they concluded that religious attendance was uniquely associated with personal adjustment.

Astley points out that times of transition have the potential to lose young people from the church, “‘losing” a particular way or form of being in faith, before a new set of ways of thinking, valuing and making meaning take over and one relaxes into a new faith stage’ (2000, p.250). First year undergraduates demonstrated considerable uncertainty, especially about

the role of reason in belief, and the extent to which they had considered their worldviews. Clydesdale (2007a) suggests that the fact that students' religious views are unchanged at the end of their first year in college, can be explained by 'understanding the powerful effects of popular American moral culture on mainstream American teens'.

Eric Greenberg describes the Millennial generation as 'Generation We' 'a special generation, potentially the greatest generation ever. They are not pessimistic or vengeful. Rather they are sober in their view of the world...They are spiritual, responsible, tolerant, and in many ways more mature than their predecessor generations. They reject punditry and bickering, because they are post-partisan, post-ideological, and post-political' (Greenberg and Weber 2008, p.6). Greenberg's research showed how much this generation in USA say their attitudes and beliefs are shaped by important factors like the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the rise of personal technology and the internet, and the Iraq war, but believe themselves to be much less likely to trust government and political leaders, and much less likely to join a church or organised religion than earlier generations. Instead their concerns are much more about the environment, seeing progressive political policies and working together to repair the damage they see their parent's generation has done to the United States and its reputation. Whether these results are completely transferable to other countries is uncertain, but the idea that this 'Generation We' is a new force for change is both an exciting and a challenging one.

As discussed, it is important not to undervalue the significance of passive factors at this stage of life; young people simply find their attention occupied by things other than church and faith. 'Adolescents simply lose interest, just stop going to church, or are incapable of providing a reason altogether...we assert that these passive rationales are prominent in early adulthood. Emerging adulthood brings with it a host of responsibilities (e.g. work, school) and opportunities (e.g. increased autonomy) that simply and subtly crowd out religious participation' (Ueker et al 2007, p.19). In a rapidly changing society, how young people develop and find their identity is changing. In seeking to understand how to engage and keep young people in the church, we must not lose sight of this and this may require particular attention to community and how the church helps young people to develop their faith identity.

Religious privatisation

One recent specific societal change of great relevance to these questions is the extent to which religious belief has become a less community based experience and a more private. Ueker et al (2007, p.20) state 'declines in religious participation could be indicative of the rampant religious privatization among even the most devoutly religious Americans which may cause some young adults to devalue involvement in a religious community.' Lytch (2004) suggests

that personal autonomy has driven a shift from community to individual identity, so religion is now no longer an obligation but a choice. Bearing in mind the earlier discussions on 'believing and belonging', Henderson et al's qualitative study of young people found support for the 'believing not belonging' theory, but also that 'it is evident that a sense of 'religious' belonging is not just achieved by church attendance, and belonging itself is a fluid concept' (2007, p.122).

The underlying attitudes found in churches are very important and Ueker et al point out that such patterns may be made worse if young adults perceive those communities to focus heavily on children or parents to the exclusion of the single or childless. Jamieson (2002) identifies 'Disillusioned Followers' as those with specific grumbles which have left them feeling angry and betrayed but, for many, still having a faith they held even more tightly than before. In his following book Jamieson later renames them 'Displaced Followers', followers 'because the faith they continue in has not substantially changed from the faith they followed within their earlier churches'; they are displaced 'because events and circumstances have convinced them to leave the EPC²² style of church even though they continue to hold great affinity with it' (2006, p.14). Although Jamieson's studies concern adults at a significantly more developed stage than those who are the focus of this study, it stimulates questions about those who have left church because of their experience of church community; 'They remain thoroughly convinced and committed to a conservative evangelical Christian faith yet they have been disappointed by and remain alienated from the established church' (2006, p.16).

An inevitable process can be set in place when both churches and young people begin to assume that there will be a parting of ways. A process of mutual withdrawal is highlighted by Jamieson, which 'involves both the individual's decreased association with a group and, simultaneously, the group's decreased demands on and involvement with the individual. As a group expects less from an individual, the rewards of belonging also decrease, such that withdrawal from the group becomes an increasingly viable option' (2002, p.41). Jamieson raises concerns that pastors may not be sufficiently aware of concerns and issues faced by church leavers and Richter and Francis (1998) found that 92% of leavers reported no one from church had discussed with them why they were attending less frequently in the first 6 weeks after attendance dropped off. This suggests that churches must listen to young people's concerns in the case that they are unhappy, take specific steps to look out for them at periods of transition and follow up on them consistently if they have stopped attending.

²² EPC: Jamieson's category of "Evangelical, Pentecostal & Charismatic" churches

Negative experiences within a religious community can be significant; Hoge and Petrillo traced attitudes of church and youth group rejection expressed by some youths to 'a dislike of past religious training and to perceptions of church leaders as unapproachable, insincere, or uncertain about expressing their own beliefs...to experiences of being snubbed or rejected by the other youth, to peer pressures contrary to church youth program participation, and to unpleasant experiences in past religious training' (1978, p.376). Dudley and Laurent (1988, p.408) define such alienation as 'estrangement or emotional withdrawal from' and showed religious alienation in teenagers to be closely related to the quality of their relationship with pastors and parents and opportunity for church involvement, their own self-concepts, and the influence of peer groups and the media. 'It is a feeling of not belonging to or not having a fit place in a society and is often accompanied by anxiety and sometimes by resentment'.

It is important to note the likelihood that negative labelling of young people whose links with church have weakened will contribute to their eventual and final disconnection. If churches tend to despair and assume that these young people are lost, this form of labelling may contribute to them ceasing to identify with church; 'religious disaffiliation is a gradual, cumulative social process in which negative labelling may act as a 'catalyst' accelerating the journey to apostasy while giving it form and direction' (Brinkerhoff 1980, p.52). Signs of disbelief and social changes may form part of the labelling process which leads to increasing discomfort in the group. 'The disruption of cherished social relationships results in a gradual 'falling from the faith'. Tagging has served as a catalyst! He [sic] has become an Apostate' (Brinkerhoff 1980, p.52).

In contrast, there is evidence of the power of positive, intergenerational community in the shaping and sustaining of young adults in the church. Cornwall (1987) found that personal community relationships have the strongest direct influence on belief and commitment and there are indirect influences from religious socialisation and demographic influences. Her findings tended to agree with previous research from Gaede (1976) and Welch (1981) that the integration of individuals into a religious community had a significant influence on religious belief. This will be examined further in the following chapter.

McGuire (2002) points out that transition to adulthood necessitates a new identity which involves ritual and symbolic roles and acceptance into adult circles, and that many cultures have expressed this through rites of passage for adolescence which allow for orderly, meaningful transition. However she asserts that rituals such as baptism and confirmation are 'relatively weak in effecting such transition in modern society' and no clear cut event marks the arrival of adult status (2002, p.62; see also Arnett 2004).

However, there may be perceived or actual barriers between generations, not least due to different outlooks, values or worldviews. Arnett (2004) describes the 'Self-focussed Age' when Emerging Adults develop a fuller understanding of who they are, what they want from life and how they are to gain the skills and knowledge to negotiate it. This may lead to an increased individualism in a number of ways, including their approach to life and faith.

The importance of faith transmission as a dialogue between generational perspectives and practices is argued by Schwab (2008) who encourages churches not to avoid this because it is difficult. Churches must understand how children and adolescents develop their own faith and 'religious instruction should therefore provide children and adolescents with a helping hand so that they can find their own way and continue along it' (Schwab 2008, p.21). Clark agrees 'Surely the task of youth ministry is to create an *environment* whereby young women and men experience the reality of the risen Christ within the context of loving community' (1999, p.106).

Preparation: weak socialisation factors

One final area of interest in the literature concerns the effective preparation of young people as they become part of a religious community and their motivation towards this in light of factors outlined earlier. Noting that decline in religiosity is not explained simply by educational, family formation and behaviour, Uecker et al (2007) suggest it may be attributable to weak religious socialisation during adolescence:

'If parents do not actively affirm and transmit the oral and written traditions of a religion, their failure to "teach the language" results in young adults who cannot "speak the language" and who are at elevated risk of shedding their religious value system altogether. Thus, once adolescents leave the structures (i.e. families) that have patterned their religious lives, religiosity may simply be left behind as well' (2007, p.20)

The longitudinal research undertaken by Fuller Youth Institutes 'College Transition Project' seeks to help to understand the characteristics of youth groups that are associated with a healthy transition to college life and help youth workers develop such qualities. However, as it has been suggested earlier, it is not sufficient to give young people an action plan or survival techniques and hope they can be launched into college and maintain their faith.

Crotty highlights the importance of specific preparation and the difference between young people knowing the risks around certain behaviour and internalising the values associated with them; 'Understanding comes first and is necessary and good. Internalization occurs when students understand what their faith calls them to and rather than weigh risks, begin to see their identity as revolving around the overlap between their story and God's story' (2008, p.2). Other researchers examine the issue of effective religious socialisation (Arnett 2004; Arnett

and Jensen 2002; Dudley 1999; Hoge and Petrillo 1978; Roozen 1980; Sherkat 1995). Smith (2003) points out the value of social context; 'for religious socialisation to occur, an individual's relationship with others in the religious community must be affirming' (Hoge et al 1993, p.243).

Bryant and Astin (2008, p.21) found religiously engaged students tended to experience less spiritual struggle than the average student. They concluded that students whose conception of God is 'teacher,' 'divine mystery,' or 'universal spirit' are more likely to struggle, while those perceiving God as 'beloved,' 'protector,' 'part of me,' or 'none of the above' struggle less (2008, p.22). Considering the importance of how young people experience religious community, the complete experience of growing up in faith is significant for the young person and their long term connection to church. How each individual is taught about God, conceives of God and sees faith in God modelled by parents and other significant people will impact their long-term involvement in faith community. Lytch found religious commitment is produced by religious socialization combined with religious experience; 'congregations that both teach youth the Christian way of life and create conditions where teens feel they meet God' (Lytch 2004, p.10).

Conclusion

The patterns of decline in the Presbyterian Church within the culturally unique region of Northern Ireland have been considered and found to be unable to be explained simply by conventional factors such as secularisation, family influence and life stage. Each individual is unique and may be affected differently by their circumstances, including factors around the experience of growing up in the 21st Century. Development and corporate factors can also influence each individual's religious outcomes in important ways and some of the ways in which young people become distanced from the church have been considered. The next chapter will consider the practice implications of what has been discussed in terms of how, not just focussing on seeking young people's strong outward commitment, churches might seek to effectively strengthen supportive links in a Covenantal context and thus the longer term 'closeness' of young people to the faith community through to adulthood.

Chapter 5: What might keep emerging adults in the church?

Factors likely to keep emerging adults close to the church will now be proposed in light of the previous chapter's discussion in relation to young people leaving or participating in church. The discussion has demonstrated the extent to which Northern Ireland is a unique environment in which young people grow up, and various influences which impact emerging adult's closeness to church have been identified. Furthermore, the literature indicates that not only are the more conventional explanations for young people leaving church insufficient, but other more contemporary factors must be considered discriminately; each individual is impacted differently by various influences and key variables must be considered when seeking to understand religious and spiritual outcomes. However, it will be argued that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland could be in a good position to keep young people close to the church into adulthood if it effectively works out its original covenantal principles in practice.

While the previous chapter necessarily focuses on negative factors leading young people to leave the church, it is vital to consider the positive influences on young people's long-term involvement in church. As the church seeks to keep young people close to their covenant home, what specific practice implications emerge from the literature and how can these be framed into hypotheses about young people's enduring relationship to church?

The discussion will be shaped around the concept of covenantal community as explored in chapter 1 and the importance of ecclesial practice and relationships in these 4 areas:

- The role of family as an agent of religious socialisation.
- The role of a faith community in the same role.
- Young people's active participation in church life.
- Individual faith development practice appropriate to developmental needs.

Family roots

Research in Northern Ireland shows the importance of the family in this culture and the place of the family in Presbyterian heritage has already been discussed (P.C.I. 1944b, p.53; S.S.I. 1867; Holmes 2006). As chapter 4 described, research shows that the family context in which a young person matures is fundamentally important and one of the greatest influences on adolescent religious and spiritual development, (Smith et al 2004; Smith and Denton 2005) although the literature is inconclusive about the precise impact on religiosity (Dudley 1988,

1999; Hoge 1988, 1993; Roozen 1980; Smith and Sikkink 2003, Wilson and Sherkat 1994). Despite uncertainty about the exact correlation of parental faith and the faith of their emerging adult offspring (Arnett 2004; Arnett and Jensen 2002), any influence may take on increased importance during the transition to adulthood. The nature of this influence depends on both the maturity of the parents' faith and the quality of the relationships they have with their children. Even a young person growing up in a committed Christian home cannot be guaranteed to adopt the faith of his or her parents. When parents finally cease their struggle to keep their children attending church they may merely accept what has long seemed inevitable (Haddoway and Roof, 1998); however, reducing family upbringing to a battle is extremely counter-productive, (Hoge et al 1993; Lytch, 2004; Strommen and Hardel 2000), and there are positive ways to support families to nurture faith in young people.

Some studies suggest a Social Learning Theory approach to family spiritual nurture, according to which parents influence their children's faith through modelling behaviour which may or may not be intentional. 'Parents have a very strong influence on the youths' church attendance patterns, mostly through their own behaviour, not through conscious efforts to socialise their children into the church', (Hoge and Petrillo 1978, p. 376). Schwartz (2006) refers to this kind of influence as the Transmissional Model and found evidence that this was predictive of adolescent faith in a study of 7,000 mid-adolescents. In the 'nature versus nurture' debate, Eaves et al (2008) found only small genetic influences on adolescent religious attitudes and practices, but much larger effects of the socialising environment of the home. Koenig et al (2005) found that genetic heritability of religiousness increases with age, whereas shared environmental factors were significantly stronger in adolescence than in adulthood.

Okagaki et al (1999) found that parental influence increases when their modelling of religious beliefs and engagement is intentional; 'the degree to which parents used multiple approaches to teach their children about their religious beliefs, supervised their children's religious development, wanted their children to embrace their faith, and modelled participation in religious activities was positively related to how accurately emerging adults understood what their parents believed' (Okagaki et al 1999, p.291). This was confirmed by a study of Generation Y in Australia which found that practising parents who are enthusiastic about their faith influence young people towards more committed levels of Christian spirituality (Mason et al 2007). Kay and Francis (1996), however, have showed that such intentional passing on of religious values has become no longer the norm within British families.

So the quality of parental influence is vital but also needs to be intentional and combined with a range of other favourable factors. The importance of a warm family relationship has been

highlighted (Wilson and Sherkat 1994; Hoge and Petrillo 1978; Dudley and Wisbey 2000; Myers 2000; Friedman and Weissbrod 2004). Furthermore, Grusec et al suggest that merely having a warm relationship with a child may not be enough for that child to acquire their values, but must be in the context of parenting which is 'a conscious and strategic effort' (2000, p.210); the degree to which they are responsive to their child's specific needs and behaviour is significant. Applying this thinking to the church context suggests that someone who grows up in a Christian home where they feel loved and valued, but where their parents did not always respond consistently or adequately to their needs, may reduce chances of the long term adoption of their parents' faith values. Therefore, the functional teaching or even modelling the Christian faith may not be effective in reproducing that faith in children if it is forced or cold; it may not even be effective even in a warm and caring home, if a variety of other factors are not also present.

Given the weight of evidence of the importance of quality relationships between parents and children as they grow up to their resulting levels of religious and spiritual development (Dudley and Wisbey 2000; Milevsky and Leh 2008; Myers 1996; Smith and Denton 2005; Wilson and Sherkat 1994), churches would be wise to emphasise the quality of these relationships for their own sake. If the emphasis is merely on the intended outcome of 'training up a child', the intended result may be impeded rather than assisted; however, a more natural and effective impact may occur if there is also an emphasis on the quality of a spiritually nurturing relationship.

Additionally, the literature on the quality of parental faith and how it is lived out within the family (Mason et al 2007; Okagaki et al 1999; Schwartz 2006) suggests that parents should be supported to fulfil their covenant vows by modelling and nurturing faith and that the role of the church in this case is to supplement this role, not replace it. 'No matter how good a Sunday school programme is, if children don't see godly living modelled and hear issues of values and faith discussed in the home, any faith they gain at church will probably not stick when they grow older' (Holman 2007, p.24). Chapter 2 examined how the covenantal role of parents outlined in Deuteronomy chapter 6 requires daily modelling and encouragement, which even the best church programmes cannot replace. Instead of adding on family ministry to an already large number of disconnected ministries in a church, Holman contends that 'the goal of every ministry of the church is to equip the home to be the primary places where faith is nurtured' (2007, p.79).

The importance of making parent-adolescent religious conversations youth centred rather than parent-centred is emphasised by Dollahite and Thatcher (2008) if this is to be an

emotionally positive experience for both parties. Schwartz's Transactional Model (2006) describes an active and intentional process in which parents and children are active agents in the internalization process. This accounted for significant variance in religious faith in her large sample and again suggests that each case is individual. Young people who grow up in families where they experience family worship were found to have the highest active faith in Lee et al's study (cited in Schwartz 2006, p.312). Boyatzis and Janicki (2003) found children to be capable of active involvement in initiating and expressing religious ideas with their parents, and this in turn can have a positive effect on faith development. 'Beyond simply modelling church attendance and other religious practices, belief and commitment seem best nurtured by both fathers and mothers who allow their children to observe, discuss and take active leadership in developing their own faith' (Schwartz 2006, p.313).

The claim of Boyatzis and Janicki (2003) that children need to be seen as active participants in religious socialisation would suggest that this is more of a creative process than a simple imputing of religious or Biblical knowledge, and faith must be woven into the fabric of family life. Such a transactional process is not something which should be left to chance and most parents would not claim it comes easily or naturally. A Youth-Centred approach to nurturing faith, where young people are allowed to talk more while their parents listen and show understanding, where religion is related to the young person's life and conversation is open within the context of relational nurturing, is proposed by Dollahite and Thatcher (2008). Even when there is intentional faith conversation in a family, this must take account of the needs of the young person, in the way indicated by Grusec et al (2000); 'When parents did not adjust their conversational approach to meet their adolescent's increasing need for individualism, they controlled and dominated the discussion, resulting in adolescent children who said they were less interested, less engaged, and less likely to participate in future religious conversations' (Dollahite and Thatcher 2008, p.638).

Therefore, it is vital that churches encourage, support and resource Christian parents in this important role and would appear that those emerging adults who come from Christian homes where this kind of intentional process has occurred may be more likely to be strong in their faith and closer to the church. Indeed, the very faith of the parents and how they themselves are disciplined seems vital in this equation and they too must be considered in terms of the various models of faith development discussed in chapter 3. Parents with an immature faith will be much less equipped to pass this on to their children and the children's faith may be adversely affected. Churches have a responsibility not just to equip parents in their specific task of raising their children in the faith, but to disciple these parents effectively as Christians also. Therefore the impact of the wider faith community is of increased importance.

Lytch found family identity to be important, signified by the respondents' statements that 'in my family we attend church' (2004, p.177); such a strong family identity tends to predict that teens will remain active in church after they leave home. Indeed, she found that regular family church attendance was the most significant factor in contributing to long term loyalty to church but that this depends on interaction with other factors. These include a warm family climate, being part of a wider social network, religion being infused into the family culture and parents belonging to the same church as their children (Lytch 2004).

The channelling hypothesis suggests that the influence of parents on future adult religious behaviour is not merely a direct one but is channelled through socializing groups and peer networks. Martin et al (2003) looked at a variety of social contexts and influences and found a significant direct relationship between parental, congregational, and peer influences and adolescent's faith maturity. In light of conflicting research on the influence of parents on their children, their data supported the channelling hypothesis in suggesting that parental influence on faith maturity is mediated by peers (2003, p.184). They also conclude that neither parental nor peer influence significantly varies during adolescence in relationship to faith maturity.

In the Transformational Model (2006) Schwartz describes how spiritual influence is first seen in nuclear or extended family contexts and then in larger community groups (e.g. friends and other adults). In this process, parents' religious socialization not only shapes their children's spiritual formation, but channels them into social institutions and settings that reinforce and help maintain their religious beliefs and commitments. Schwartz found that in her sample, the transformational pathway enriches the understanding of the important interpersonal relationships (friends) associated with religious faith. 'It was found that the perceived faith support of friends mediated the influence of similar parental support on adolescent's religious belief and commitment' (2006, p.320). Erickson also points out that during adolescent years, parents direct their children to other social influences which are more salient (1992, p.149). Koenig et al (2008) show the importance of peers and others on the development of emerging adults. Rew et al (2007) also found that both family and peers influence religious and spiritual beliefs, supporting the idea that spiritual impact on young people is complex and individual.

As another example of this complexity of relational influence, Gunnoe and Moore's study of 17-22 year olds found that religiosity during emerging adulthood is best predicted by the presence of religious role models during childhood and adolescence (2002, p.620). However, although they specifically identified the influence of highly supportive religious mothers in developing religiosity in their children, the role of friends, and other religious role models was also important. O'Connor et al (2002, p.731-732) found that the greatest influence from

childhood or youth on long-lasting church involvement was not their own attendance at Sunday school or church, their parents' church attendance or even the amount their parent's spoke to them about religion, but the denominational culture in which they were raised, including teachings, habits and overall family culture.

The literature indicates that the role of parents is neither sufficient nor can be seen in isolation from other factors. Richter and Francis conclude that churches should be more 'family friendly' and supportive of parents in their bringing up of children in the faith (1998, p.157), enabling families to be together more in church. Bryant (2003) found great value in family ties and unity and suggests that helping young people maintain family connections may also help spiritual development. In considering the challenge of maintaining young people's closeness to and connection with the church through to full adulthood, their experience of spiritual formation in the home is an area of crucial importance. If young people have had a positive experience of nurturing faith at home, does this make it more likely that they will stay the course? If so, what helps parents to do this in a positive and effective manner? The question remains, however, regarding whether too much is expected of families alone; the role of the wider community can be of vital importance, especially for those whose family upbringing is not so effective in faith development or who grow up in a home where there is no faith. It is not simply a matter of effective family upbringing or good youth leaders or a positive church experience but how these and other factors cumulatively impact each individual.

The individuality of this impact also varies according to age and stage of development. Given the social and developmental changes which have earlier been highlighted, shifts in the importance of socialising factors must be acknowledged. 'As young people grow beyond childhood and into adolescence and emerging adulthood, the strength of family socialization wanes while the influence of socialization sources outside the family increases' (Arnett and Jensen 2002, p.464). If emerging adults see independence from parents as good and necessary, we must consider the importance of other adults and peers as a vital part of the equation. Lytch suggests that passing on faith is no longer what it used to be, but requires creation of an environment where young people can choose faith; *'Together family and church nurture teens in the religious tradition'* (Lytch 2004, p.12).

The literature shows the complexity of familial impact on faith, having various interdependent external relationships. Especially for emerging adults, we must consider not just parents' faith and how they modelled or passed it on, but the quality of parent-child relationships and their connection to peers and other adults in the faith formation process. In the covenantal context, family must not be seen as an isolated unit but part of a wider faith community.

Faith community

As discussed in chapter one, the roots of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have both the family unit and the 'church family' very firmly at its centre. Although cultural shifts have led to the erosion of family and community in wider society, it does not imply that such former practices were merely cultural and should not continue to be a core part of the theological identity of the denomination. The Presbyterian Church has been shown to have a strong covenantal value system which underpins much of the liturgical and sacramental practice of the church, especially as it impacts children and young people. There is little evidence as to whether these values and practices have the same continued prominence but the experience of the researcher has raised questions about significant changes in practice and attitude.

The issues of ineffective faith community which were highlighted in chapter 4 include generational barriers, (Richter and Francis 1998), the 'mutual withdrawal' and sense of inevitability felt when young people's ties with a church begin to slip (Jamieson 2002) and a lack of follow up on those who do leave (Richter and Francis 1998). The importance of the peer group within the wider church community is also apparent (Dudley 1988; Hunsberger 2000) and Holmes et al (2004) found that peer and mentoring relationships were instrumental to students in shaping how they made meaning of college academic and social experiences. Hoge and Petrillo (1978) discovered peers have a moderate influence on religious behaviour though their participation in activities and the enhancement of this experience. Lee (2002, p.382) found beliefs are strengthened when adolescents attend institutions with peers who frequently attend religious. In a study of 'Amazing Apostates' (AAs) and 'Amazing Believers', (ABs), Hunsberger, (2000) examined how people develop spiritually in a way which seems unlikely when considering their family background. He concludes that 'one might seriously doubt that most of the ABs would have converted without the interest and guidance of their friends' (2000, p.242). The Transformational Model of faith presented by Schwartz (2006) is very helpful in understanding this complex mix of relationships. Christian friends become 'a forum that legitimates the adolescent's own search for individual belief and commitment that was started many years earlier within the context of the parent-child relationship' (2006, p.323). Again, it appears there is no simple cause and effect but a complex combination of factors which impact each individual uniquely.

Peers are not the only significant relationship in this equation and the idea of a safe context in which young people can develop their faith is at the heart of the concept of covenantal community through both active and intellectual faith. Scales et al (2006) found young people's involvement in volunteering, youth programs and religious organisations to significantly

enhance their experience of the impact of non-family adults and suggests that positive community contexts may affect longer-term developmental outcomes. A number of papers by Larson and his associates have examined the impact of community based, (including faith based), youth activities and found that they had significant influence on the development of autonomy and personal identity exploration, (e.g. Dworkin et al 2003; Hansen et al 2003; Larson et al 2006, 2007). Furthermore, they found that participating in such programmes gives an opportunity to develop greater autonomy within the family context (Larson et al 2007). The value of the wider community in terms of the young person's development is also raised by such as Dudley (1988) who makes various suggestions about the importance of relationships with adults and the value of opportunities to serve alongside them. Hughes et al (2000) found that many of the emerging adults in their survey discovered there was no natural transition from the youth programme into adult church and highlight the need ensure there is a planned and easy transition for young people to wider church family. 'In general, personal circumstances played a larger role than problems with churches or issues of faith' (Hughes et al 2000, p.188) so it is important that the needs of every individual are considered in this process.

Clark argues for congregations to welcome young people beyond specific youth ministry programmes and 'give them a place to connect and a community that is safe to explore faith, life, and gifts' (1999, p.104) and Cornwall highlights the value of genuine integration of individuals into the wider religious community (1987). 'Adolescents need an open, receptive, and respectful environment where they are free to try on and test new roles and identities in order to develop permanent, internalized, personal, and spiritual foundations...Adolescents grow both spiritually and personally in a community' (Junkin 2002, p.39).

'Christian education is the church's attempt to help its people see and grasp the inner character and hidden nature of its own experience as a confessing, repenting, proclaiming, praying community in response to God's gracious, redeeming activity in the world' (Dykstra 1987, p.545). In this context, adolescents must be able to fully benefit from being part of this worshipping community; if they are sidelined, the riches of the 'sin-tainted' identity process identified by Dykstra will be kept veiled from them. Are young people embraced in the heart of the formative process and how can being at the heart of a worshipping community help their own identity formation?

As mentioned previously, churches should be careful not to try to replace parents in their central role of bringing up their children in the faith but play a key complementary and interactive role. Persuasive as arguments may be from those like Holman (2007) regarding the essential role of Christian parents, this does not tell the complete story. The most obvious

incongruity is the case of the increasing number of children and young people who attend church programmes but whose parents do not attend and may not even profess faith. In these cases the nurture of the church family is vital and even for a young person from a Christian home, it is a complex combination of factors which nurtures their faith through to adulthood.

Perhaps a useful perspective involves a wider definition of the term 'family'; although the various issues discussed in the previous section are very relevant to the birth family, it is helpful both in the context of practice and a covenantal framework to see family in a broader sense. Strommen and Hardel (2000) present a number of factors which make a congregation feel like family, including a sense of mission, intergenerational service, an emphasis on prayer and developing a hospitable, caring environment and inspirational worship.

'When most or many of the factors that make a congregation a family are present, the congregation will have a sense of family. And congregations with a sense of family, in partnership with families that are close to one another and close to God, will raise young people who have a committed faith in God' (Strommen and Hardel 2000, p.185).

Therefore, in the context of how faith is formed in adolescents and emerging adults, the influence of a variety of individuals and corporate 'faith family' is a vital consideration. Strommen and Hardel in particular call strongly for intergenerational activities which will develop family-like relationships between generations in the faith family and that, again, is best done in conjunction with the young person's own family; 'a congregation is the only institution in a community that is open to all ages and is equipped in its program and message to provide a family experience' (Strommen and Hardel 2000, p.157).

Nel promotes the idea of conjunctive faith, joined up with the body, and he states that the concept of discipleship is indivisible from that of membership of an incarnational community; 'a learning community put their arms around children and adolescents and walk with them' (Nel 2009, p.16). Within this context, Nel urges churches to 'creatively reinvent simple but meaningful...*celebrations of inclusion*' (2009, p.21, italics his). Lytch (2004) also emphasises the importance of the family community socialising teens into the symbols, stories, rituals and practices of the faith and creating conditions in the faith community where they can experience God.

A caring, inter-generational community is clearly important to keep young people involved in church, where each individual matters and is sought out even when they drift. A young person who is fully integrated into a genuine worshipping community where they are given space to form their personal and faith identity will be more likely to have a long-term involvement in that church; this raises questions about how to practically encourage such involvement.

Roehlkepartain (2003) and the team at Search Institute in Minneapolis studied how a congregation nurtures faith and spirituality in children, youth and families and how it builds faith assets, that is the positive experiences, opportunities and qualities which its research has shown are important in developing faith in young people. They emphasise the role of every member of the congregation and found that people in churches generally have a higher priority on the future of their young people than they often realise, but that there is often potential to develop themselves as a caring, supportive community.

The value of specific youth, children's and emerging adult programmes within congregations is also an important consideration. Francis et al (1991) found that Sunday schools bring a distinct and important contribution to the religious development of adolescents in addition to what was achieved through parental influence and church attendance; however they found this to be marginal in nature in relation to the sizeable influence of contemporary church attendance. 'Unless Sunday school attendance during childhood leads into teenage membership of the church congregation, the impact of the Sunday school on adolescent religious development is marginalized. This indicates that churches which invest heavily in Sunday school work need to give equal attention both to the pastoral care of those who are out-growing Sunday school attendance and to assuring that there is adequate opportunity for children and young people to grow into a welcoming Worshipping *community*.' (Francis et al 1991, p.40).

In this context, Smith (1998) uses the concept developed by Peter Berger in the 1960s of a 'sacred canopy' of religion which protects its members from chaos and terror, and points out that this image does not survive in the postmodern world. Instead, Smith suggests the idea of a 'sacred umbrella' which is portable and individually handheld; inhabitants of today's world need 'small, portable, accessible relational worlds – religious reference groups – "under" which their beliefs can make complete sense' (1998, p.108). Within the context of this discussion, this is a useful image for young people seeking to develop a community which helps them gain a sense of meaning and belonging and develop their strong religious identity.

It can be seen that the value of any youth programme is diminished if it is divorced from the context of the wider church community: the quality of that faith community can significantly enhance the faith experience of a young person and can 'grab' them. 'It is the deeper, more universal things that congregations offer though a variety of means that attract teens: a sense of belonging, a sense of meaning, and opportunities to develop competence' (Lyth 2004, p.9).

The longevity of faith and closeness to the church is much more likely if an individual finds their own safe place, integrated into an intergenerational covenantal community. Youth programmes are important but must be firmly embedded in a wider congregational life where

each person matters and simple relational principles make it much more difficult for any individual to drift, especially when they become too old for those programmes. However, young people's presence in that wider community must not be passive if it is to have true meaning, but the congregation should ensure they are equipped to fulfil a level of meaningful participation; this is the next area of focus.

Participation

'When young people realize that they are not seen simply as empty containers to be filled up, but that the wider Church really wants and needs their contributions, there can be real energy and transformation. Other indications that young people are involved are when they are 'at home' with church structures, when older church members realize better decisions are being made with young people's input, or when events and church committees etc. work round young people's key commitments' (Green and Green 2000, p.66).

This statement, based on a large project seeking to increase young people's participation in the Church of England, speaks of how real participation is not a matter of token gestures but must genuinely engage young people in the work and decision-making of the church.

Historical attempts to involve young people in decision making of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland were unsuccessful, precisely because they did not achieve this authenticity, but recent attempts have proven much more promising. This must happen at more than denomination level and historic congregational attempts at youth councils and similar bodies have also had mixed results, whereas more recent examples show a genuine attempt to give young people access to the life and heart of a congregation. In 2009 the Presbyterian Church in Ireland piloted a Youth Assembly called SPUD (which stands for Speaking, Participating, Understanding and Deciding). This was youth-led and sought 'To enable young people to have a meaningful opportunity to be involved in decision-making at a denominational and a local level.' SPUD has since had a significant impact on the denomination, with young people contributing to debates in the General Assembly and being invited to influence the work of various key committees. However, the SPUD leadership are committed to impacting at a local level and so has prioritised this local development.

Participation happens at different levels. O'Connor et al (2002) identified key variables which could predict the person's church involvement when they were 38 years old, and found that the only one relating to before age 16 was how much they participated in youth groups. Even this basic participation in youth activities is significant, therefore, but often not sufficient, as the *manner and extent* of that participation is also very important.

Participation has been shown to be best practice in a general youth work context (Barbour 2009; Green and Green 2000) and participation has been shown to be a positive influence on personal development in the church (Dudley 1999; Good et al 2008). Participation in its widest sense is insufficient however and Dudley (1988) highlights the importance of young people's relationship with pastors if they are to remain involved in church. Richter and Francis (1998; p.50-51) found young people expressed a desire to be more involved in church, to have opportunities to have their views heard and others who emphasised the need to understand the meanings of teaching and belief. Those who did not feel a part of their church were unlikely to remain part of the congregation.

Participation also has another aspect, in terms of the role of active faith. Kesiling (2008, p.22) argues the need to change discipleship curricula from programmatic assertion of religious truth to 'offering experiences of faith that actively engage emerging adults in putting faith into practice' and this is effective in the form of active service and mission.

McGuire (2003, p.63) highlights how 'Contemporary rituals of transition are ineffective partly because religious groups allow ritual adulthood to members whom they do not consider really adult'; she gives example of 13 year old Presbyterian communicant whose suggested changes to church activities were patronisingly laughed off. The need to genuinely listen to young people within the context of a supportive environment is vital (Junkin 2002, p.38), even though this is not always easy for churches; 'a dialogue with young people may be difficult, but such a challenge is to be a church *im semper reformanda*, as it professes to be' (Schwab 2008, p.11).

For teenagers and emerging adults to participate in a meaningful and effective way, they must be informed, prepared and equipped, otherwise participation will become tokenism. We need to acknowledge the developmental and experiential stage of each individual in order to have realistic expectations about *how* they will participate in a real way. 'The problem here is that too often congregations want youths to participate as *adults* participate, rather than as *youths* participate. Youths need developmentally specific ways to channel their energies and idealism; they need their own ways to put into practice the movement of God in their lives. There need to be able to serve in ways that are different from adults. The entire congregation will benefit from this...' (Black 2001, p.25).

Barber (2009) examines youth participation and citizenship from a wider secular viewpoint and points out that the concept of participation is contested, not well-defined and can be dominated by consumerist thinking. He states that not all forms of participation may be democratic or egalitarian and points out that some have argued there should be a distinction between 'participative' and 'empowering'; in fact some 'participation' may be designed to best

serve adults. Thus the 'adultising' of young people by adults who will not accept them for who they are but only if they mimic 'responsible' adult behaviour and values is part of a 'top down' model of participation which is driven by fear and control on the part of the adults (Barber 2009, p.36). In contrast, 'bottom up' models are driven by young people's aspirations as they engage, take risks and develop their identity and Barbour proposes that 'new forms of engagement can be developed as part of the mainstream which responds to young people, within the context of their everyday lives' (2009, p.38).

With this in mind, it is imperative that churches who genuinely want to enable young people to participate in the life and decision-making of their congregations must be honest about the model they are using, clear about their motivations and careful about their methods. This means that young people's needs and characteristics should be carefully considered. One interesting perspective on this aspect of youth participation is from Alma and Heitink (1994) who researched young people's involvement in church life in the context of their worldview and life patterns. They propose a model of integrative learning within intergenerational community which acknowledges the individuality of young people and their cultural and social development, most specifically in differentiation and individualisation. Their research shows young people find it difficult or impossible to connect their faith with other frames of reference within their worldview, such as school, relations, and work or leisure activities.

Alma and Heitink suggest that churches should therefore contextualise their teaching within the world which is familiar to young people and that the church should engage more visibly in this secular world. They also state that because of increased individualisation in society, 'the church will therefore have to be a community that offers young people the opportunity to train in their own way, in participation, through liturgy, education and activities' (Alma and Heitink 1994, p.71). Finally, they emphasise that the needs of young people must not be surpassed by the needs of the wider church community but there must be the opportunity for intergenerational learning and role models to inspire young people in their own faith journey; 'Finding one's own identity, including believing in God, also depends on the availability of identification models, with room for experimenting...so that young people can develop their own form of being a community' (Alma and Heitink 1996, p.72).

Arnett describes emerging adulthood as an 'Age of Possibilities', when scope for making one's own decisions greatly increases; 'It seems to be an age of high hopes and great expectations, in part because few of their dreams have been tested in the fires of real life' (Arnett 2004, p.17). Although churches should find meaningful ways to enable teenagers to participate in the life and decision-making of congregations, perhaps 18-25s have particular potential to be involved.

One particularly important way of participating is through service opportunities. Wuthnow (2007) found that one of the characteristics of congregations in America who seem to be successfully attracting emerging adults is having opportunities to serve, especially volunteering with the poor and needy. Such service opportunities can provide emerging adults with both a sense of community or belonging and a feeling of purpose or meaning, thereby increasing their connection with the church and developing their own personal development. Strommen and Hardel (2000) also found that how much a congregation mattered to young people was directly related to their involvement in service in the congregation and they also found an outcome of this to be a greater evidence of faith. So for young people to remain as members of churches through to adulthood, they must be active participants who feel part of a caring community in which their voice is heard and they play an important contribution. It is important to consider what is especially important about the development of these young people if this is to be an effective aim, however and the idea of worldview and developmental stage is core to the final area of consideration.

Although the formative power of the faith community can seem weak in the face of today's highly pluralistic and mobile cultural forces, the worshipping community is presented by Dykstra (1987) as being sin tainted but redemptively modified and transformed:

'The faith community has formative power in the lives of people. It can nurture their faith and give shape to the quality and character of their spirits. Faith is formed, developed, and owned in the context of communities of faith. Spirituality deepens in community rather than individualistic isolation. The beliefs, values attitudes, stories rituals and moral practices of one's faith community are the human forces most powerful in shaping a person's spiritual journey' (Dykstra 1987, p.530).

The formative influence of Christian community for emerging adults developing their identity is emphasised by Keisling (2008, p.20) and Junkin (2002) also highlights the need to support young people at a time of identity formation by giving opportunity for personal and spiritual development in the context of faith community. She demonstrates a strong connection between intrinsic religious motivation and identity achievement which shows a parallel development between faith development and personal development; 'Intrinsic religious motivation does not develop in a vacuum; it flourishes in a supportive environment where the adolescent is encouraged to explore and grow in faith' (Junkin 2002, p.37).

To enable young people to find an appropriate place in church life and participate meaningfully into adulthood, they must be treated as individuals and included in a way which acknowledges and meets their individual needs. Lytch (2004) argues that congregations will maintain long term connections with young people when they create a place where they can believe, develop a sense of belonging and then achieve competence. All three of these aspects

are effectively combined when young people are enabled to have meaningful active participation in the life and decision-making of a congregation. As young people participate in a significant way they develop competence and acquire an understanding of church doctrine which will help them understand and believe in a more meaningful way; all this will help them gain a broader sense of significance and belonging. As young people become fully members of a covenantal community, they must have a means of participating which is tangible and matters in their real lives.

The other dynamic which emerges frequently from the literature in this section is that each person must be seen as an individual and be allowed to find their place in a way which recognises their uniqueness. This leads on to the final area of significance, that of the importance of each person's individual religious belief and practice.

Individual religious belief and practice

The idea that young people are still forming both their identity and their worldview during their twenties has been presented as having explicit implications for practice during both teens and twenties. The overwhelming evidence suggests that it would be incorrect to assume that primary spiritual formation is achieved during childhood and teenage years and expect individuals to be balanced, mature Christians by age 18. As mentioned in the previous section, O'Connor et al (2002) found only one factor from before age 16 to predict involvement in church when someone is aged 38, suggesting that the work with teenagers is far from done.

Arnett (2002, 2004) recognises that many emerging adults struggle as they are slow to identify with an institutional body, but desire to belong in a wider sense. King et al (2003) and Furrow et al (2004) demonstrate the importance of religion as a developmental resource and that religious institutions provide a unique setting for adolescent identity formation. Barry and Nelson (2005) argue that, as emerging adulthood is a time when young people separate identity and worldview, they tend to question the faith and beliefs with which they grew up, emphasise individual spirituality more than institutional affiliation, and select from religion the aspects which seem most suitable to them. This means that there must be a safe place in which emerging adults can raise those questions, be free to express their doubts and individuality, even if the adults there struggle with some of the views expressed. Powell and Kubiak (2004) found those who felt most free to express doubt and discuss their problems reported the greatest faith maturity and religious motivation in college.

Arnett (2004) presents Emerging Adulthood as an 'Age of Feeling In-Between' and a time when young people are eager to make their own decisions; even religious conservatives surveyed expressed the desire to come to those beliefs through a personal process of searching and questioning. Therefore, giving young people at this stage of development the opportunity to develop their ability for critical thought should be seen as vital to their future involvement in church, not a threat to it.

The importance of such a safe place is seen in the need for emerging adults to be supported in owning their own personal beliefs and experiences (Hoge et al 1993; Hunsberger 2000), combined with the importance of cognitive factors in faith development (Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993; Hunsberger and Brown 1984). This will also help young people to develop the intellectual aspect of their faith so they have a better understanding of what they believe and why (Moreland and Matlock 2005). Keisling argues that in the face of competing voices and a changing world, 'the church has a great stake in how personhood is regarded, how vocational ideals are shaped, what symbolic images confer life's meaning, and the ways in which identity formation is being restructured in the lives of emerging adults today' (2008, p.25).

De Haan and Schulenberg (1997) found that college students who had low levels of religious exploration also had low levels of belief and involvement. In contrast, those with high religious achievement were found to be significantly related to internalised religiosity, i.e. religiosity is strongest where individuals have had the opportunity for an active period of exploration before making a firm commitment

Teaching young people or emerging adults in a way which encourages accumulation of information alone or the ability to 'correct answers' will not be sufficient for spiritual endurance in the light of these issues. If thinking is black and white and young people are not enabled to engage in personal ownership of what they believe in the reality of an often turbulent life, their faith is unlikely to survive. Parks (2000) describes 'shipwrecks' which are experiences or revelations which will challenge assumptions, perceptions or worldviews, and can leave one's faith vulnerable. 'The power of the experience of shipwreck is located in one's inability to immediately sense the promise of anything beyond the breakup of what has become secure and trustworthy. Until our meaning-making becomes very mature, in the midst of shipwreck there is little or no confidence of meaningful survival' (Parks 2000, p.31). Therefore emerging adults must be empowered to develop a sturdiness of theological thinking which will help them respond to the challenges of life, as well as a safe place to express doubt and discouragement.

Schwietzer found a lack of specific religious education which has adapted to the changing developmental needs of emerging adults; 'it may be argued that distance from the church in this case is not due to young people's lack of interest in religion but rather to the absence of interesting possibilities for participation' (2000, p.97-98). Teaching needs to acknowledge the needs of the student and Clydesdale (2007) believes it is not effective to plead with first year students to swim against the cultural and economic tide, but he suggests there may be anecdotal evidence of a small window of opportunity to engage 2nd and 3rd year students (aged around 19 or 20) more deeply in religious and non-religious pursuits.

Similarly, research on the characteristics of the new developmental stage of Emerging Adulthood would suggest that churches need to support their spiritual and faith development in a very intentional and deliberate way during this crucial life phase. 'A wide variety of pathways to adulthood have emerged, making ministry difficult with a group that is no longer homogenous and does not transition as a cohort through predictable marital or family statuses' (Keisling 2008, p.25).

Indeed, Arnett (2004, p.174) sows seeds of great doubt on the long-term effectiveness of childhood religious socialisation. It has been described how research generally implies that churches should not take a cooling of faith or a cessation of church attendance to be the last word on the spiritual destination of their emerging adults. Rather, Arnett is one of several who suggest that, especially during the emerging adult period, belief can be stronger than practice and so young people can find attendance as less important than before, thus absence may not be a sign of lack of belief. Instead, there could be a lot to be said for seeking the lost sheep, keeping even loose ties as long as possible and doing all they can to intentionally support those emerging adults they do have in their faith development journey.

The story of the Lost or Prodigal Son told by Jesus in Luke chapter 15 illustrates those who may be seen as having left their spiritual home, especially during ages 18-25. Churches that may be resigned to having lost them to 'the world' might instead see themselves in the picture of the father in the story who is waiting for the return of the son, indeed, running down the road to meet him. Those who are concerned for these young people, rather than being surprised by their desire to leave, might instead almost expect it; they then may then ensure that the 'home' they have left is so attractive that they will always know they will be welcome to return there and feel the draw to do so. Jesus presentation of the young man 'coming to his senses' when he realised what he had left behind is an image which should inspire churches to

prioritise the relationship with each individual, whoever they are and wherever they are on their spiritual journey.²³

Using Arnett's description of Emerging Adulthood as an Age of Instability, it would be reasonable to assume that staying at their 'faith home' is more unlikely for reasons including those which were examined thoroughly in chapter 4, such as studying or working in a new area, or developing new interests and commitments. Therefore congregations would be wise to develop not one strategy but a range of approaches which embrace the reality of those who have left, whilst creating an appealing faith community to which they may be drawn to return and those who remain are encouraged to continue.

A common theme among the literature is how different forces and effects can impact in different ways. Ingersoll-Dayton et al (2002, p.68) found in their retrospective study from a Life Course perspective that the same forces had contrasting effects on different people, for instance adverse life experiences increased religiosity in some and decreased it in others. Some of this could be explained by broad factors such as class or gender but the evidence is that each young person should be treated as an individual and cared for as such within the faith community.

For many young people, the role of the youth group in secondary school years is a vital part of their faith development; O'Connor et al (2002) found this to be the one strong long-term predictor of church involvement. However, this impact can be diminished if young people become too old for their youth group, but have not identified a place in their wider church where they can fully feel at home. Therefore it is vital that churches both ensure that they feel connected to the wider church family and have significant relationships there as discussed in the previous section, but also that they have a group or opportunity which is shaped for their particular developmental stage.

Such opportunities or programmes should include the space to express doubts and develop independent thought, as discussed earlier. As encouraged by Mooreland and Matlock (2005) and Parks (2000) churches should find ways to encouraging teenagers and emerging adults to engage in critical thinking which helps to make their faith durable and personal.

Indeed, emerging adults will be very cautious about any context in which they suspect they may be the subject of an attempt to impute knowledge. Within a university educational context Clydesdale urges 'a paradigm shift in how we approach our students that parallels a paradigm shift in the broader culture' in light of students' ability to access and interpret

²³ I am indebted to Mark Yaconelli for his wisdom in developing this concept of 'prodigal'.

knowledge for themselves, rather than simply consume what is presented to them. 'In other words, we need to approach our classrooms as public intellectuals eager to share our insights graciously with a wide audience of fellow citizens' (Clydesdale 2009). If this approach is applied to the discipleship of emerging adults within churches, it should lead to intentional equipping of young people to engage in a very different form of learning to that which may be traditionally found in many churches.

In his study of Presbyterians, Hoge et al (1993) found religious belief to be the strongest predictor of emerging adults' current church involvement, with more theologically and morally conservative beliefs producing greater commitment. This suggests it is important to support young people in working out what they believe, a view supported by Astley (2000, p.263) whose study of first year undergraduates found uncertainty about the role of reason in belief and that many of the subjects had not considered or formed their worldviews. He suggests they may have a critical openness to belief, but that uncritical openness is more dangerous ('a window stuck open', 2000, p.263), as those young people are not sure what to believe.

'The spiritual realm and the deeper life questions it brings to light do play a role in the young adult journey, making attention to these issues on the part of practitioners, administrators, and faculty a clear necessity. Indeed, there are critical implications of struggling spiritually that are intimately tied to students' sense of well-being and adjustment to the adult world. Failure to recognize the seriousness of these facets of students' lives is to leave them quite alone on their quest to understand central issues of meaning' (Bryant and Astin 2008, p.23).

Nelson's study of how young Mormons experience emerging adulthood suggests that Mormon rites of passage are generally preserved in a way that had an important effect of hastening identity development (2005, p.47). Bearing in mind the limitations of applying this study generally which were mentioned earlier, this still raises questions about whether young people who have a positive experience of Christian rites of passage within the Presbyterian Church could also be more likely to have a strong faith identity and to stay connected to their church.

Such an effective experience requires theological, sacramental and practical preparation. Powell and Kubiak's study of graduates of Presbyterian youth ministries from previous 4 years found the most commonly raised difficulty regarding transition to college related to friendships and the second most common related to feeling lonely (2004). Their third most commonly raised issue related to difficulty in finding a church or faith community: many felt unprepared or unequipped to do this. The young people in their study urged youth workers to give practical preparation in this and in handling the temptations related to lifestyle pressures, not just education on what is wrong.

‘Parenting, mentoring and spiritual caregiving require careful and sustained discernment of the idiosyncratic attributions and decisions young adults are making in constructing objective meanings for their life narrative and in interpreting their competence in various social contexts’ (Keisling 2008, p.23).

In conclusion, it is necessary to recognise that young people are changing how they develop their adult identity, which in turn has strong implications for how we support them to develop their faith identity and find their place in the faith community. If the church does this well, emerging adults may then have a better chance of retaining that place in the community.

Hypotheses

It has been argued that the covenantal foundation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is a useful framework to consider how young people can be kept close to the church through to adulthood. Lytch suggests that faith will be nurtured effectively when the right combination of belonging, believing and achieving competence is addressed.

‘Congregations that attract large numbers of youth do so by offering teens a sense of belonging that ties them into the fellowship of their church, a sense of the comprehensive meaning of the whole of life that is base in religious truth, and opportunities to develop various competencies that assist them as they cross the threshold into adult roles and institutions’ (2004, p.198).

This describes well the way in which a combination of factors, rather than any one distinct variable, will impact the religious commitment of an individual, and do so differently in each individual. Within the unique context of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland within Northern Ireland, it is suggested that the key influences identified in chapter 3 – family context, faith community and personal development – combine in a way which impacts young people’s faith and closeness to the church within context of each individual’s circumstances. It is therefore proposed that emerging adults will be more likely to remain connected to the church through to adulthood through a combination of the following experiences:

1. Family: they have a positive Christian home experience which nurtures faith.

Emerging adults from Christian homes where faith is intentionally and naturally modelled and developed in a youth-focussed way will be more likely to grow up with a secure faith. The nature of the relationship with their parents is also likely to be a key factor, as is the young person’s relationships with peers and other significant adults.

2. Community: they are strongly connected to an intergenerational faith community.

The influence of peers and other adults within a faith community will be significant in helping a young person integrate within that community in a way which helps them belong. If they are actively involved in the community, age-specific programmes are integrated rather than isolated and if they develop intergenerational relationships, they will be more likely to have a secure place there. In addition, their faith will be more likely to endure if they have a 'sacred umbrella' – a flexible and individual faith reference group - which enhances their personal and faith identity.

3. Personal (active participation): they have a meaningful role, integrated into wider church

As part of their own individual faith development, young people are more likely to remain attached to a faith community when they are able to participate meaningfully; this will happen through service and participation in decision-making, when they are genuinely listened to and when they are able to be a unique individual within that community.

4. Personal (individual needs): the community described above nurtures their belief and practice in a way which reflects their individuality and developmental stage.

As these emerging adults are still finding their worldview and identity, they need a safe place where they can develop their faith as an individual, develop critical thinking to apply to practical faith. They are more likely to remain if they are connected to the wider intergenerational church in a way which they still feel part of it when they leave the teenage programmes, and they are more likely to return if they are followed up as individuals when they drift away.

Lytch encourages the creation of the right kind of community to keep young people close to church; 'In plain terms, churches can attract teens' deep human needs to belong, to believe, and to be competent. They can hold teens if they get serious about teaching the faith and introducing teens to an experience of the holy' (2004, p.13). It is proposed that the Presbyterian Church can provide that kind of community by supporting Christian parents in intentionally nurturing faith at home and by providing intergenerational community which allows meaningful participation and recognises the individuality of each young person at their developmental stage. If any or all of the four factors described above are present in combination, a young person is more likely to be close to the church into adulthood. Conversely, they will be more likely to loosen or lose their church connection when these factors have not been their experience, but they may still have a faith despite not attending. These four main areas will form the basis of the research as described in the methodology.

Chapter 6 – Methodology

Introduction

This research was born out of a desire by youth workers and others within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to understand why so many young people who have been actively involved in their churches during childhood and teenage years do not retain their connection after age 18, or earlier. The aim was to understand what factors are important in influencing whether or not those aged 18-25 remain involved with their congregation and to consider this through a framework of covenant theology. There was consideration of what tends to characterise those who endure and what tends to be missing from those who are no longer connected in terms of the areas of home influence, church family, participation in church life and attention to the developmental and personal needs of the individual.

There has been substantial research on those who leave church, mostly conducted within North America and to a lesser extent in Great Britain. Examination of this in previous chapters prompted a number of questions, particularly relating to those who leave youth programmes but are not yet established as adults within churches. Those aged between 18 and 25-30 have been described as 'emerging adults' (Arnett 2004), a distinct developmental stage, and this age-group was the focus of this research. A number of themes emerge from the literature and these have been examined in detail within the particular Presbyterian tradition of covenant or family theology. These themes include the role and importance of the family in which the young person grows up, their experience of being part of a wider church 'family' and how important they feel there, their role within that community in terms of participation and ability to influence decision-making processes, and the issue of how the particular developmental needs of those in emerging adulthood are accommodated.

Although the denomination is an all-island body, the research was restricted to Northern Ireland as there are significantly different cultural issues in the Republic of Ireland which would require a separate study. No study has previously examined these issues within Northern Ireland and this research seeks to break new ground in understanding what factors are important in whether young people retain their connection with their home church. It is hoped that this will help inform the practice of the denomination and local churches in how they relate to young people and in particular those in the 18-25 age group, thus helping to increase their retention within the denomination.

The previous chapters have examined how the complex pattern of experience, environment and developmental issues may impact whether young people who have had church

involvement or profess Christian faith will continue to be involved in a local church past 18. A number of variables were identified as potentially significant and quantitative methods were used in order to identify the frequency with which these occur in those who remain closely connected to their church or are missing in those who are not connected. Chapter 5 identified that a combination of factors, rather than any one distinct variable, impacts the religious commitment of an individual, and these impact each individual differently. Therefore it was necessary to examine the relationship between these variables according to the frequency with which they have been observed in the sample. Next the results of this first quantitative phase were used as a basis for a detailed qualitative investigation into the manner in which these variables may impact young people and their future connection with the church.

According to the discussion in the previous chapters, it was proposed that young adults are more likely to remain connected to the church through to adulthood when they experience a combination of the following:

1. They have a positive Christian home experience which nurtures faith.
2. They are strongly connected to an intergenerational faith community.
3. They have a meaningful role, integrated into the wider church.
4. The community described above nurtures their belief and practice in a way which reflects their individuality and developmental stage.

It is proposed that if any or all of the four factors described above are present in combination, a young person is more likely to be close to the church into adulthood. Conversely, they will be more likely to loosen or lose their church connection when these factors have not been their experience, but they may still have a faith despite not attending.

The aim of examining these factors presents a number of challenges in terms of how to make contact with a suitable sample, such as contacting sufficient young people to discover what patterns occur, especially in those people who are no longer connected with any church. It was also important to ensure that the sample is representative of the geographical, cultural and theological variations within the denomination, both for those who are and those who are not still involved. Perhaps the biggest challenge was how to accurately measure some of the criteria, so questions were designed to investigate key aspects of the areas of interest in a way which helped them provide data as easily and directly as possible, whilst giving participants an opportunity to provide additional information as appropriate.

The importance of obtaining honest and accurate information is critical to any research and it is essential that the participants do not feel any pressure to participate or to provide 'acceptable' answers. For those who were asked to complete questionnaires, it was made clear that they were anonymous and no one would know if they had completed a questionnaire or what they have said. For potential interviewees, it was made clear throughout the process that they could withdraw at any time without warning and without having to give an explanation. It was also explicit that this right to withdrawal extends to beyond the interview and they were given contact details of the researcher and his supervisor should they have wished their interview to be withdrawn from the research. This right to withdrawal extended until 1st May 2011 after which the data could no longer be extracted and the interviewees were made aware of this deadline.

The researcher has a wider role within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and ensured that this dual role was acknowledged within the research design. In the initial letters to respondents the researcher made it clear that the approach was in his capacity as student at Kings College in London. Whether they knew the researcher in any other role, their information was equally confidential and anonymous as if they did not. Interviewees were also given the contact details of the researcher's supervisor at Kings College should they have wished to withdraw in a more anonymous manner. If questionnaire respondents knew the researcher in some capacity, this made no difference to the completion of questionnaires as they were anonymous. As far as possible, the researcher ensured that none of the individuals invited for interview was known to him; however, given the nature and size of the denomination and the profile of the researcher within it, this could not be guaranteed and had to be balanced with finding an appropriate and representative sample. Almost inevitably there were some connections to the interviewer in at least 2 cases, but all reasonable efforts were made to ensure these made no difference to the interview and it is believed that the interviews were carried out in an objective and neutral manner.

Participants were made aware of the boundaries of confidentiality and the project was subject to careful data protection conditions, with personal data stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act. The online surveys were stored according to the secure, encrypted procedures operated by the online survey company, Survey Monkey. Processed questionnaires, digital audio recordings and transcribed interviews were securely stored on the researcher's computer system. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland operates a network server which is backed up daily. All computers in the organisation are password protected and files containing personal data were password protected. The researcher has his own section of the server which cannot be accessed by other members of the organisation.

Approach

To examine the issues in this research question, the target population was identified as those aged 18-25 who are associated with Presbyterian churches in Northern Ireland. The reasons for specifying this age bracket were their broad equivalence to the emerging adult group as defined by Arnett (2000, 2004) and their classification as 'young adults' by the Presbyterian Board of Youth and Children's Ministry. Given the nature of the questions being asked, it was not appropriate to sample from the general population of that age in Northern Ireland as a large proportion will have had no connection with any church and only a minority will have had a connection with a Presbyterian church.

Figures from the 2001 census of Northern Ireland, the most recently available at the time of research, (NISRA 2002), showed that 158024 people were aged 18-24 and a little over 17% of those (i.e. approximately 26864) claimed to have a Presbyterian affiliation²⁴. Even allowing for expected under-reporting of religious affiliation in a Northern Ireland context, it would be expected that many less than that figure would have an active membership, as many of these are likely to be people with a broad and loose affiliation. Unfortunately, statistics from the Presbyterian Church do not categorise attendance as under and over the age of 18, so for all these reasons it is very difficult to even estimate the numbers of those aged from 18-25 who at some point have had an active connection.

For the reasons outlined, the study sought to survey those who have had some active connection with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, considering exclusively those who are associated with congregations in the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland. It was considered infeasible to consider congregations in the Republic of Ireland as the context there is significantly different and the differences between young people growing up there and in Northern Ireland are much greater than those between different congregations in areas of Northern Ireland. Young people in the two countries also experience different education systems, different cultural environments and different religious contexts. Protestant young people, and Presbyterians in particular, make up a tiny minority in the Republic of Ireland and congregations are significantly smaller and widely dispersed geographically. Although the questions in this study relate equally to churches in the Republic of Ireland and the answers would be of great interest, this would require a separate study.

²⁴ First results of the 2011 census published in July 2012, revealed the number of 18-24 year olds in Northern Ireland had risen by 11.5% to 176200, while those aged 0-17 fell from 451,514 to 430,700 in the same period. 20.7% of the 2011 population stated they were Presbyterian, but no age breakdown was yet available (NISRA 2012a, 2012b).

It is also important to define carefully which young people to target within these churches. Although an active church connection is no longer the norm for most young people in Northern Ireland, many will have or will once have had an occasional connection, perhaps attending a youth club on a few occasions or will claim an association because their granny goes and they might go with them to Christmas services. Although these connections are not unimportant in the wider context, this study is concerned with those who have had an active connection for a sustained period of time. It is intended to contact those who were involved at secondary school level, whether or not they attended as children. This will more sharply define the sample and ensure their involvement covered this key developmental period.

Criteria

The sample population was defined according to the following criteria:

- aged 18-25 years (inclusive) on a 30th June 2010;
- had been regularly attendees to Sunday worship or at least one programme in the church, where 'regular' is defined as once per month or more;
- had sustained this attendance for a period of at least one year
- attendance must have been at some point between their 11th and 18th birthdays

Clustered random sample

At the time the research was carried out there were 444 Presbyterian congregations situated in Northern Ireland, so it was not possible within the resources of this study to attempt to connect with young people associated with each one of those churches. Therefore it was decided to identify a 10% random sample of Presbyterian churches in Northern Ireland, clustered to ensure it was representative of all the churches in Northern Ireland. Individual churches have much in common but have some potentially significant differences in terms of the impact on whether their young people stay connected past 18. It was important therefore to account for factors which may influence the overall experience of growing up in church and have a significant impact on the longevity of young people's attachment.

Maton and Domingo highlight the importance of contextual factors on adults volunteering to work with young people in a church setting, consistent with contextual theories of volunteering. 'In the faith-based context, contextual features include *differences in the theology, mission, structure, organizational capacity, location, social climate, and size of congregations....* Concerning congregational size, on the one hand, very large congregations may be expected to have greater organizational capacity; on the other hand, the presence of

more paid staff may reduce the need for and number of opportunities to volunteer within the congregation per se' (2006, p.173, emphasis mine).

Zaleski and Zech (2006) highlight the importance of the size of a congregation and Stonebraker (1993) found an indication that there may be ministry advantages of larger congregations, but that the dynamics are too complex to conclude that bigger is always better. Roozen (2002) discusses a range of factors including whether a congregation is in a rural or urban setting, its strictness and its style of worship. Others have given careful consideration of the influence of the urban or rural environment on a religious community (Diamond 2003, Church of England Archbishops' Commission on Rural Areas, 1991).

Pinto and Crow (1982) examined the relative impact of the size of a congregation and the size of the community in which it is located on a church's tendency to sectarian transformation and found that it was congregation size which was the most important factor and that structural attributes were important in impacting other characteristics of the religious community. The congregational culture or theological emphasis is also proposed as a factor influencing how likely young people are to remain attached long term. For example, the strength of strict congregations is highlighted by Iannaccone (1994) who argues from rational choice theory that such congregations discourage members who lack commitment and stimulates participation among those who remain. His views are somewhat contentious however (Marwell, 1996); although it is possible that the strictness and theological influence in a congregation will impact how young people grow in their faith and how likely they are to be invested in participating in the congregation, it may also have a negative influence, in that young people may be reluctant to remain in a church which is too strict.

In light of these considerations, the random sample of Presbyterian churches in Northern Ireland was clustered around three specific variables to ensure they are as representative as possible of the broad types of congregation within the denomination. This involved sampling according to the **region** in which the church is located, the **size** of the congregation, and what kind of **location** according to urban / rural characteristics. The method of defining and obtaining this sample according to these three variables will now be identified.

Region

Even as a small country, there may be significant differences between congregations in different regions of Northern Ireland and young people may have a very different experience of church as the prevailing church culture is very different for various cultural, social and theological reasons, so this was the first variable in the sample. In the north-west, for

example, there are particular issues of ‘church culture’ notably that many individuals become communicant members for reasons other than informed choice. Some are reported to come to their first communion to fulfil parental expectation, often because their parents will then no longer require them to attend church. In many churches in this part of Northern Ireland there may be a more sheltered and less secularised culture. Northern, and arguably southern or boarder Presbyteries may tend to be more theologically conservative and this will have a significant impact on ministry practice with young people. In contrast, churches in the east may have a more secular, urban culture.

For the reasons outlined, Northern Ireland was divided into four regions to broadly represent these geographical and cultural differences, even though there are no distinct boundaries to mark the contrast of these variables. It was important that each of the four regions contained approximately the same number of congregations but was difficult to divide churches according to region and still ensure they broadly reflect the regional distinctiveness.

The Presbyterian Church is divided into districts known as Presbyteries, each of which has its own administrative boundary. New Presbytery boundaries were set in 2009, reducing the number of Presbyteries from 21 to 19, of which all but 2 were in Northern Ireland and one of which (Derry and Donegal) is a cross-border Presbytery. However, the new boundaries do not allow for an even division of four regions with a roughly equal number of churches in each. These boundaries also have had less time to affect the ‘church culture’ of congregations within the Presbytery which is likely to have stronger historical impact from the older boundaries. It was therefore considered preferable to use the old (pre 2009 changes) Presbytery boundaries, which tie in better with the regional variation, but to use the most current data for each congregation which was published in 2010 and relates to 2009. This division allowed a cluster with the following number of churches in each region as in table 6.1 below.

REGION	2008 Presbyteries	Number / % of congregations
North	Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Coleraine, Route, Templepatrick	118 (26.5%)
East	Ards, Belfast East, Belfast South, Belfast North, Dromore	122 (27.5%)
South	Armagh, Down, Iveagh, Newry	100 (22.5%)
West	Derry and Strabane, Foyle, Omagh, Tryone	104 (23.5%)
Total		444 (100%)

Table 6.1: Geographical regions according to allocated Presbyteries

Size of Congregation

The second variable in the cluster sample was designed to account for the potential difference between churches according to their size, although it is difficult to predict in exactly what way size may be an influence and to what extent this may be so. The size of a congregation may influence issues such as opportunities and the way relationships develop. For instance, the greater resources of larger congregations may increase the chances of them retaining young people, whereas in contrast, the greater intimacy in smaller congregations may be advantageous to them. Smaller congregations often struggle to find a 'critical mass' of young people to undertake effective activities, whereas 'a crowd brings a crowd' in other situations, although this may not necessarily be advantageous in the long run if individuals do not feel important. Therefore issues around the size of the congregation need to be carefully and specifically addressed in the study in order to measure and understand any possible impact.

Congregations within the Presbyterian Church are traditionally measured in size according to the number of 'families' who belong, where families are represented by households.

Congregations range greatly in size, with a relatively small number of very large congregations (31 of the 444 have over 500 families and only 9 over 750) but there is a fairly even spread of those under 500. 129 congregations have 100 families or less and 284 are spread evenly between 100 and 500 families.

Dividing churches into three equal groups of 148 according to size would have allowed for a greater spread in congregation size, but would also have left a number of cells with less than the minimum number to allow a sample to be taken from that cell so was deemed not to be suitable. The median number is 180 families and to divide into 2 groups would leave 222 in each. Although this has a large range within each band, it ensured that none of the cells had too small a frequency to exclude sampling from that cell, so this method was selected²⁵.

There are regional variations in the spread of congregational size, but the sample ensured that equal numbers of each size category are chosen so the influence of size on the young people's closeness to the congregation can be measured in each region.

LOCATION of Congregation:

The final variable in the cluster sample sought to account for potential differences in type of community in which the congregation is located. The extent to which the context is rural or urban has associations with the congregation's cultural, demographic and behavioural context

²⁵ Table A1.1 in Appendix 1 shows the comparative numbers which would be in each cell if using 2 or 3 congregation size categories and the red figures highlight cells of less than 3 which would not have provided sufficient sample quantities.

which may lead to different experiences of church and faith development. This may impact the likelihood of young people remaining closely connected to their home congregation.

The 'Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group: Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements' published by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (February 2005) defines what constitutes an urban or rural area and classifies the settlement bands indicated in table 6.2 below. The table also shows how the percentage of people aged 18-24 varies from the 9.38% in Northern Ireland as a whole, ranging from 10.15 in the most urban area to 7.97% in some rural areas (NISRA 2005). This highlights the potential impact of factors such as frequency of taking up employment or 3rd level education at a distance from home and the relative strength of family ties in different parts of the country.

<u>Label</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Settlement population size</u> <u>(2001 Census)</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Mean</u> <u>age</u>	<u>% aged</u> <u>18-24</u>
Band A	Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area (BMUA)	c580,000	579554		10.15%
Band B	Derry Urban Area (DUA)	c90,000	90736		10.82%
Band C	Large town	18,000 or more and under 75,000*	223884		8.79%
Band D	Medium town	10,000 or more and under 18,000*	100625		8.95%
Band E	Small town	4,500 or more and under 10,000*	101817		8.95%
Band F	Intermediate settlement	2,250 or more and under 4,500*	65006		7.97%
Band G	Village	1,000 or more and under 2,250*	68008		8.36%
Band H	Small village, hamlet and open countryside	Settlements of less than 1,000* people and open countryside	455637		8.94%

Table 6.2: Statistical classification of settlements

* (outside BMUA and DUA)

Although these do not equate exactly to Presbyterian churches or those who attend them, it is a very useful classification and has the authenticity of having been constituted by a recognised Government body. There is great variety in the urban/rural nature of the four regions identified which made it very difficult to sample in a way which reflects the detail of the range of location of churches. For instance, in the East region almost all the congregations are from band A, but only 19 congregations are from band H. In contrast, over 60% of congregations in the South and West regions are in band H. The Interdepartmental Urban-Rural group proposes that for general purposes bands A-E are classified as 'urban' and F to H as 'rural'. Therefore the sample reflected these two settlement classifications, namely 'urban' (Band A – E, containing 65.1% of population and 38.5% of congregations) and 'rural' (Bands F, G, & H, containing 34.9% of population and 61.5% of congregations) are outlined in table 6.3.

	Bands	Population	% population	% congregations	% aged 18-24
Urban	A-E	1096616	65.1	38.5	9.71
Rural	F-H	588651	34.9	61.5	8.76

Table 6.3 regional classification of sample

Although there is also great variety in the patterns within the variables identified, samples were taken to ensure congregations were included within each of the four regions, according to size of congregation and whether they are urban or rural. This meant the sample was drawn according to the criteria as summarized in the table 6.4.

LOCATION	Small		Large		<i>total</i>
SIZE	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	
North	3	3	3	3	12
East	3	3	3	3	12
South	3	3	3	3	12
West	3	3	3	3	12
<i>total</i>	12	12	12	12	48

Table 6.4 sample grid for the 3 variables (using 2 size categories)

Data Collection Techniques

In order to maximize the understanding of how the different variables impact young people's long term involvement in church, a breadth of information was required from a representative sample of churches, selected using the method described. Additionally, a depth of information was also necessary in order to understand how the variables impact individuals. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used.

QUANTITATIVE phase

Each congregation in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland which was located within Northern Ireland was identified and given a label according to each of the categories: Urban/Rural, Large/Small and East/South/West/North. Then the SPSS random sampling programme was used to select approximately 10% of the Presbyterian Churches in Northern Ireland, 12 churches were sampled from each region, 2 from each of the 6 Size/Location groups in each

region, producing 48 churches in the total sample, as shown in table 6.4.²⁶ Having identified the sample congregations, and obtained prior consent from the Clerk of the General Assembly, (appendix 2.1) the ministers of these congregations were contacted, initially by letter (appendix 2.2) and then with a follow-up phone call. This enabled a full explanation of why this research was important, how it would potentially benefit the church and how their help was invaluable, increasing the likelihood that ministers would agree to participate. If any minister had declined to participate, another congregation from the same category would have been selected according to the same random procedures, however each congregation did agree to take part. In one case, 2 congregations from the same presbytery which had each been sampled had recently merged, but the minister agreed to treat young people from each former congregation separately for the purposes of the exercise.

The ministers of these congregations were asked to identify approximately how many people aged 18-25 are associated with their congregation within the clearly defined criteria, as described previously. Invitations were then sent to their minister to pass on to those people, either by letter or by email as appropriate. In a few situations the congregation was vacant or the minister was ill or unavailable, so an elder was identified to fulfil that role and in some cases the task was delegated to a youth worker or suitable other person. Letters were personally delivered or mailed to the minister or alternative representative and in each case a follow-up phone call was made to ensure the invitations had been distributed. Direct personal or telephone contact with ministers was a priority at each stage in order to maximise personal investment and reduce risk of misunderstanding or an uncommitted response.

1178 invitations were sent to people from the 48 congregations. Regionally, significantly less invitations were sent to people in North, more in South and East (1 congregation in each of those regions took a considerably more invitations which inflated the figures in these regions). Unsurprisingly, Small congregations took half the proportion of invitations than Large congregations and in terms of location, more invitations taken by Urban congregations. The figures for this can be seen in table A1.2 in appendix 1.

Each person contacted by the ministers therefore received an envelope by post or an email which contained a letter of introduction (appendix 2.3), an information sheet outlining the project and what it hopes to achieve (appendix 2.4) and a link to an online questionnaire. This questionnaire was hosted by the web-based survey site 'Survey Monkey' as this format allowed for ease of completion and return and assured anonymity. Those who received an email may have been more likely to respond than those who have received a letter, but either

²⁶ Table A1.3 in appendix 1 lists the region, size and location of each (anonymous) congregation chosen.

route was expected to illicit more response than a postal return. Evidence to this is variable however, as Sax et al suggest that online surveys can produce a lower response rate than paper surveys, but that some of the reasons for this is to do with issues connected to the use of college versus personal email (2003, p.423). Farrell and Peterson (2010) are much more positive about the effectiveness of web-based surveys, especially due to the improvement of technology has in recent years. It was emphasised that ministers emailing the invitations should ensure they have a current email address which is the individual's primary address.

Farrell and Peterson (2010) highlight the impact of making an emotional appeal to participants to overcome some of the lack of interpersonal warmth of internet surveys. They cite Trouteaud (2004, p.390) who says "Pleading for the help of the respondent throughout the survey can have constructive effect" and point out that multiple motivational approaches may well be needed. Kaplowitz et al (2004) found that advance mail notification of web-based surveys was significant in positively influencing response rates. The use of online questionnaires is especially suitable for this age group who generally spend a high proportion of time online compared to other ages and tend to be familiar with such media. Kaplowitz et al (2004) found a bias to this age group between web-based and paper surveys.

Online questionnaires also have the advantage of both saving time and reducing costs (Wright 2005; Kaplowitz et al 2004) and being easy to transfer data into data analysis software. (Wright 2005). Some of the disadvantages of online questionnaires, such as uncertainty about the sample accuracy (Wright 2005) and email spam defence (Farrell and Peterson 2010) are not relevant in this case as the sample has not been chosen by online means.

As no directly comparable study exists, original questions were required to be designed for this survey. Thy key criteria were to ensure the questions adequately measured the research question and that there was sufficient information provided to ensure the participants have good understanding of what was required and could express their answers unambiguously. Questions were piloted on a small group of 6 emerging adults, who work with the researcher on a participation programme and were motivated to see the study succeed. They were asked not just to complete the questionnaire but to explain their understanding of the questions and why they answered the way they did, also giving them an opportunity to seek clarification if any questions were ambiguous. This was achieved by the person piloting sending an email immediately after completing it and it proved to be a very useful and encouraging exercise. The feedback is included in Appendix 4, along with an explanation of changes made to the questionnaire in light of the feedback, and why any suggested changes were rejected.

The information requested included basic biographical information such as age, gender, education, work relationship status, whether they left home to study or work and whether or not they are currently involved in their previous church or another church. The questionnaire also sought to ascertain a respondent's experiences of growing up in their church and the strength of their current connection to it. It was designed to be both simple to complete and engaging to the respondent, addressing the key variables which were examined in the literature. These included the following: their relationship with their parents; the role their parents played in their spiritual development; the role of peers and other adults in their spiritual development; their participation in sacramental aspects of church life such as baptism and communion; their participation in spiritual practices such as prayer and Bible reading; their experience of organisations and programmes targeted at children and young people in their church; their experience of engagement with individuals in the wider congregation; their participation in church life through both active involvement and access to decision making; their experience of programmes and opportunities designed for people their age in their church (see appendix 3.1 for questionnaire).

Completed questionnaires generated a unique code number which was used to identify the region, locality and congregation of the congregation of individual who sent it. According to the frequency of return, some ministers were contacted once more to see if they could follow up with any of the young people to whom they gave questionnaires. The data was entered into a data base and at a set point, 30th September 2010, the questionnaire was closed to allow data processing to commence.

110 individuals accessed the questionnaire and began to respond, but only 98 were useable responses; that did not mean that each one of those 98 completed every question, simply that they completed the majority of questions and actively finished the questionnaire.²⁷ 4 of the 12 unusable responses ruled themselves out by answering in the negative to question 12 which asked 'Did you attend something (i.e. an organisation, worship or any regular activity) at on a regular basis (i.e. at least monthly) for at least a year between your 11th and 18th birthdays?' This was the key criteria which defined the 18-25s as suitable subjects for the study as identified previously. The other 8 unusable responses completed less than 10 general questions at the beginning and did not sign off on the questionnaire.

Of the invitations sent, there was an 8.3% response rate of useable questionnaires, which is estimated to be approximately 1% of the whole population of 18-25 year olds in the target

²⁷ A respondent was deemed to have completed the questionnaire if they moved through all the pages as indicated by the Survey Monkey evidence, answered at least up to question 38, and clicked the "done" button at the end of the questionnaire.

population (see table A1.2 in appendix 1). There was some difficulty in examining the responses according to the sample criteria, as 4 respondents did not indicate their congregation. 14 of the congregations sampled had no respondents indicated.

Of those who were identifiable, responses from East region were overrepresented compared to sample,²⁸ with 39.4% of responses in contrast to 27% of churches in the sample.

Conversely, there was a poor response from those in South region with only 18.1% of responses compared to 33% of invitations.

There were proportionately many more respondents from Large congregations compared to sample (69.1% compared to 50%) and but this response was broadly consistent with proportion of invitations sent. There were fewer Rural responses than sample but reasonably consistent with Invitations sent.

On the evidence of the 94 respondents who indicated their 'contact church', 29 congregations (60%) had between 1 and 3 respondents, 5 had more than 3 and 14 had none. 85.0% of West respondents were from Rural congregations and 47.8% of Urban respondents were from East. 83.8% of East and 70% of West respondents were from Large congregations and almost 50% of Large respondents were also from East. Large congregations were 58.5% Rural and Small congregations were 58.6% Urban. Rural congregations were 75.9% Large and Urban congregations were 61.3% Large. 64 of the respondents were female (65.3%) and 34 were male. There was a fairly even spread of ages, with a mean age of 21.16, a median of 21 and a mode of 19. 45% were in full-time education and 33% were employed full-time. 90% had been educated to at least A level and almost 2/3 were either currently undergraduates or had completed and undergraduate education.

In summary, the sample can be accepted as generally representative of the population, and there are no significant anomalies in terms of gender, age, region, location or size.

QUALITATIVE phase

A small number of individuals were sought for individual interview to give the opportunity for in depth examination of the patterns found in the quantitative stage and help to understand more of the connections between the different variables. It gave vital depth to the research which was not possible through questionnaires, giving respondents opportunity to reflect on their experiences and explain their own personal story in more detail.

²⁸ Mostly skewed by a big response of 14 from one large congregation

To identify suitable interviewees, a final separate section at the end of the questionnaire asked participants if they would be willing to be interviewed further about these issues and to complete an additional section with their contact information if so. It was made clear to them that this information would be kept separately from their questionnaire answers and not used to identify who had answered in a particular way.

20 of the 98 who completed questionnaires indicated a willingness to be interviewed and their biographical information was used to select a broadly representative sample of 9 individuals (just under 10%) using a balance of variables as follows:

- A range of ages, from 19 to 24.
- 6 females and 3 males, reflecting the 2:1 ratio of those who answered the questionnaire.
- A reflection of the self-reported faith of the 98 respondents; also 6 attended church at least weekly and 3 less than monthly.
- 6 were from Rural and 3 from Urban churches.
- 2 had lived outside Northern Ireland and 2 away from home within Northern Ireland.
- 7 came from Large churches and 2 from Small; a larger proportion from Large churches agreed to be interviewed, but the aim was to still reflect a balance of all variables

They were sent an email invitation to be interviewed, again outlining the aims of the research and reason for the interview. A follow up telephone call was made to obtain their agreement to interview and arrange the meeting. One person politely declined to be interviewed, but offered to support the research in any other way he could. Another had failed to receive the email but again declined to be interviewed upon receiving the telephone call, but was very positive about the contact. These two were replaced with roughly equivalent interviewees. Prior to the interview, each individual received a further letter or email with the date and time of interview, the information sheet (appendix 2.5) and a written consent form (appendix 2.6). The information sheet gave details of the main topics to be covered during the interview and they were asked to read this and the consent form carefully before the interview.

Each interview took place at a convenient venue chosen by the interviewee, all public places seven in coffee shops and one in a hotel lobby. The other interview was conducted by telephone as the interviewee now lives in G.B. In each case, the researcher informed a colleague of the time and venue of the interview, though not the identity of the interviewee; a text message was sent to the colleague on completion of the interview to confirm he had left.

The researcher was aware that such an interview might uncover sensitive issues and made respondents aware of the boundaries of confidentiality in the unlikely event that they would disclose, for example, something relating to the harm of a child in the past or present, and

what would be required if so. The researcher had information about counselling organisations should any respondent require it after relating a sensitive issue, but this was not necessary in any of the interviews, even though some were very candid about their personal situations.

Interviews were semi-structured one-off events which ranged from 40 and 90 minutes, though most were 50-60 minutes long. The interview focussed on the themes from the questionnaires, but also reflected some of the patterns revealed in the quantitative stage of the project. The questions were structured to aid the flow of the interview and enable the respondent to feel most at ease, starting with more straightforward biographical and unthreatening questions, leading to those more in depth issues in the main part of the questionnaire. Potentially difficult or controversial questions came at the end when there was also the opportunity to emphasise anything they have particularly valued about their church and home and to have a final opportunity to raise anything they believe would help young people. The interview schedule is in appendix 3.2.

The interviews were transcribed by two of the researcher's administrative colleagues under strict confidentiality and then the researcher checked each transcription with the audio recording at least twice for accuracy. The transcriptions were then made anonymous, giving each person a pseudonym and replacing all place and people names and other information which might identify the interviewee, such as their church or school. Place pseudonyms used were selected to reflect the character of the town or church without making it identifiable. An example of one of the interviews is found in appendix 5.2.

These interviews proved to be a very rich source of data, with all 9 of the interviewees engaging very well in discussion and providing full and open answers to questions. Brief anonymous profiles of each interviewee can be found in appendix 4, along with a selection of responses according to a variety of topics.

Analysis

The Quantitative data was processed by extracting it from the Survey Monkey database, converting it to Excel format and then preparing it for SPSS where it was analysed to identify patterns and connections under the following headings:

- Sample characteristics: patterns according to variables.
- Faith and faithfulness: self-reported faith and church attendance.
- Family nurture: role and influence of parents and family experience.

- Beliefs: baptism, communion and attitude to Presbyterianism.
- Church nurture: influence of specific individuals and groups and church experiences, including provision for 18-25s.

Data was compared using graphs and tables to identify patterns according to the 3 categories (size, region and location), self-reported faith and church attendance of the respondents.

The transcribed interviews were analysed to find information about 6 key topics:

- Faith: personal faith and factors influencing faithfulness.
- Family: the influence of parents and family members and faith practices in families.
- Faith community: the influences of people and experiences in church.
- Doctrine: experience and attitudes regarding sacrament and Presbyterianism.
- Participation: opportunities to participate in the life and decision-making of church.
- Developmental: faith and experiences of those aged 18-25.

Statements from each interviewee were then collated under each topic heading to allow for examination of patterns in each subject and the selection of quotations which have been used in chapters 7 and 8 to illustrate the quantitative data and provide more in-depth information on the patterns behind the behaviours and attitudes which emerged from the research.

The themes and patterns which emerged from the quantitative and qualitative data are discussed in detail in chapter 7.

Chapter 7 – results

Introduction

The preceding chapters have raised a number of searching and significant questions about the faith and enduring involvement of emerging adults within the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland. The empirical phase of the study sought to gain an accurate picture of these young people's experiences of faith, church and life. A significant amount of useful and interesting material emerged from the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study and it was a subsequent challenge to identify from this which elements were the most useful to clarify the questions being addressed. Therefore, this chapter will highlight and examine the most pertinent results and ascertain how they inform understanding of the continued involvement or otherwise of emerging adults in the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland.

Responses

As noted in the previous chapter, the sample was representative of the population in all important respects, including their age profile, and the region, location and size of congregations from which they came. This reinforces the usefulness of data as an accurate reflection of emerging adults in the Presbyterian Church within Northern Ireland.

One of the disappointing features of the sample was the small number of those who have left the church, limiting examination of the patterns of church leaving. However, more positively, the sample shows strong levels of faith and attachment to the church, with two thirds of questionnaire respondents having been at their Contact Church since infancy and the remainder having first attended church over a spread of ages. Overall, more than 80% were 'still involved' in their Contact Church and over 50% still attended that church weekly, thus the sample contains high level of religious activity. The commitment within the group allows for comparative analysis of patterns between levels of faith and attendance and sufficient numbers of disengaged provided data of some use.

The 9 interview candidates were selected according to broad characteristics which represented the sample that completed the questionnaires, so that meant that most were spiritually committed, though some more so than others, but there were also some who had become disengaged with the church. All of these interviews provided extremely useful material to augment and illustrate the quantitative data.

Patterns of faith and behaviour

Respondents were asked to choose a statement which best describes their current faith; of the 92 who responded to the question, 32.6% said they had a 'strong & active faith', 54.4% said they 'have Christian faith but not as active as it might be'. A much smaller proportion covered the other three options; 5.4% said 'Once Active Christian but faith not so important now', 5.4% said 'No longer a Christian' and 2.2% said 'Never have been a Christian and have no faith'. Given the small numbers of those who defined themselves in degrees of having no faith, the respondents were combined into three overall categories:

- 'Strong Active Christian' (**SAC**) i.e. those who said they had a 'strong & active Faith'
- 'Less Active Christian' (**LAC**) i.e. those who said they had 'Christian faith but less active than it might be'
- 'Variously Inactive People' (**VIP**) i.e. combined categories of people who said they have no active faith, including those who said 'faith is not so important'.

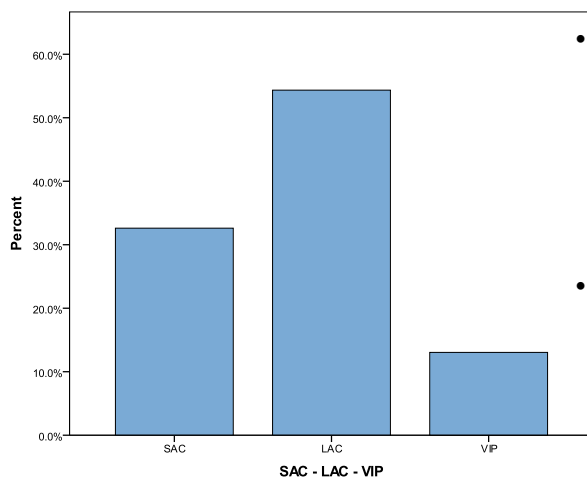


Figure 7.1 reported faith (n=92)

- These 3 abbreviations will be used from this point onwards; the proportions of those categories were: SAC = 32.6%; LAC = 54.4%; VIP = 13.0% (figure 7.1).
- Although there was no gender difference between faith categories, there were some differences according to the type of contact church to which respondents belonged.

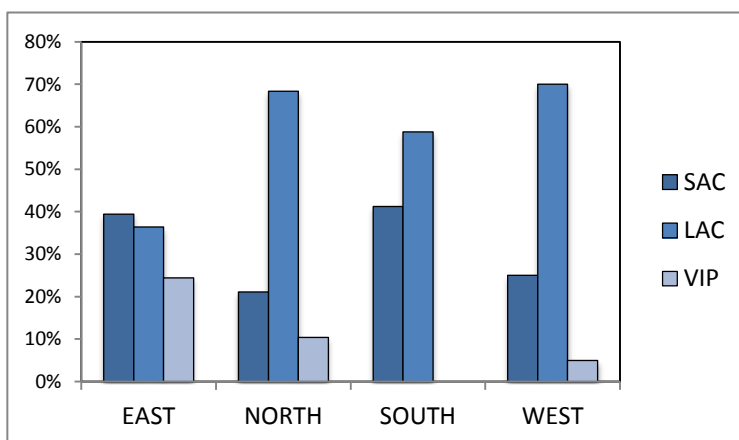


Figure 7.2 Congregation region by reported faith of respondents (n=93)

Figure 7.2 shows how SACs were more common in the East (39.4%) and South regions (41.2%), compared to North (21.1%) and West (25%) (figure 7.2). LACs were less likely to come from East region (36.4%), compared to North (68.4%), South (58.8%) and in West (70.0%). However, VIPs were more common in the East (24.2%) compared to North (10.5%), West (5%) and South (0%).

Figure 7.3 shows how Rural respondents were less likely to be VIP (8.5% compared to 16.7% of Urban respondents) but also less likely to be SAC (27.7% compared to 38.1% of Urban); thus respondents from Urban churches were less likely to be LAC (45.2% in contrast to those 63.8% of Rural churches).

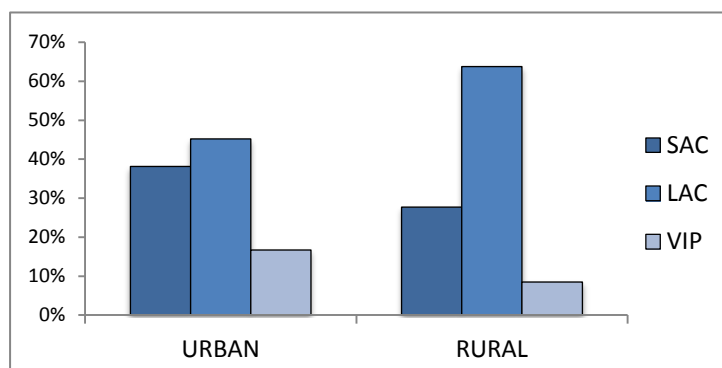


Figure 7.3 Congregation location by reported faith of respondent (n=93)

Similarly 34.4% of respondents from Large churches were SAC compared to 28.8% from Small churches, but 67.9% of Small churches were LAC in contrast to only 49.2% of Large churches (Figure 7.4). In summary, Smaller and more Rural churches appear to be more likely to have

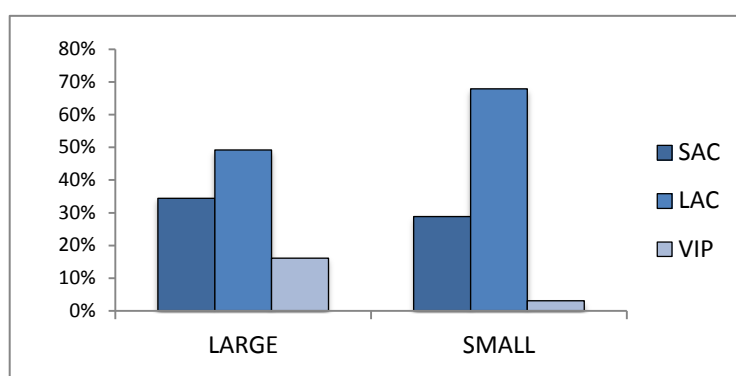


Figure 7.4 Congregation size by reported faith of respondent (n=93)

respondents who profess faith (SAC or LAC), whereas Larger and Urban churches and those in the East (with more Urban and Large congregations) are more likely to be SAC but also more likely to be VIP.

The interviewees were very open about their faith, often describing candidly what their faith meant, or has meant, to them, describing how they came to faith and how it has developed in their lives more recently. One consistent theme was a pattern of ebbs and flows in faith, times of struggle and other times of more spiritual growth, even in those seeming most secure in their faith. Amy described faith as her 'top priority' but admitted '*I think everyone's faith goes through stages - some days, maybe for a couple of months... (some days) I wouldn't be close at all but I still have the faith but I would be not, you know, spiritual connection, whereas other days I would be so full in the spirit, it just changes so...*' Laura had clear spiritual depth but also admitted that there were times when she had doubts and she appreciated the support of her church family; '*it is not like my doubts stop me from being a Christian and following, having a relationship with God*'. Andy also had a clear active faith, though had this reservation:

I'd say it's really strong, but it could be so much stronger at the same time, it is so easy to go to church on a Sunday and give yourself to God, but then there is times when you should be, you should be giving yourself to him all the time, like in everything you do you should be worshiping God and giving your all to him.

Some were very open about their struggles, including Emma who revealed how her faith had been invaluable on 3 or 4 occasions; *'if God wasn't there I don't think I could have got through them. As the poem says 'Footprints in the Sand' - God was my footprint in the sand'*. Helen described a period of her life when a lifestyle had impacted her faith, but explained how things changed for her after a prayer meeting; *'...it just really hit home to me and I just went home and I was broken and I was like, 'I haven't been walking my life the way I want to', so I just left it all with God and said 'look, I am starting Uni, I want a fresh start' - and I did'*.

Of those who no longer professed faith, each had once had an active faith. Becca said that her faith had once been strong and continued to be an influence, but no longer a major one. David said he made a faith commitment but immediately found it hard to continue in that faith. Nicky had once had strong faith but now was struggling to find a church which embraced her lifestyle, as she lives with a same sex partner. She reflected on a common more experience of her generation: *'At this sort of age, people are exploring a lot more, I don't have active faith I would say, caught in a burning building I would run in the right direction but...'*

Overall the young people in this study demonstrated considerable Christian faith and even those who no longer expressed significant faith showed that it had been important to them; none had rejected their faith outright, suggesting each might return to faith under certain circumstances. In contrast, Helen's candid testimony summed up well the spiritual commitment evidenced by most of the interviewees:

'After this summer I have just been blown away, that is how I would describe my faith, how God's moving. Very encouraged but still struggling, I find it very hard to find my quiet time and pray and all and I will put my hand up and say that... I hope that God shows us more and I think God is going to move in Midtown and I want to be here to see it

The testimonies of these emerging adults are likely to be typical of many of their peers within P.C.I. but they lead to questions about why their faith developed as it did in each case. There was a valuable amount of evidence on this from both qualitative and quantitative data.

Church attendance

Respondents were asked about their church attendance, other than special occasions such as weddings and funerals, either at the Contact Church or at another church. As only a small proportion of the sample attended on a very infrequent basis, attendance was grouped into 'At least weekly', '1-3 times per month' and 'less than monthly'. 62% attend *some* church 'At least weekly', 19.5% 1-3 times per month, 18.5% less than monthly (figure 7.5).

When church attendance figures are cross-referenced with reported faith levels and it shows that 80.0% of SACs attend some church weekly, compared to 64% of LACs; despite this suggested relationship, it cannot be deduced from that whether a more active faith will make church attendance more regular or whether regular attendance encourages stronger faith. It is interesting to note that, although the numbers are small, 16.7% of VIPs still attend 1-3 times per month and of the remaining ¼, 41.7% attend less than monthly but at least 3 times per year (table 7.1). That means that even in this 'inactive' group, 2/3 attend at least 3 times per year suggesting a continued tentative connection.

Figure 7.6 Church attendance by reported faith (n=92)

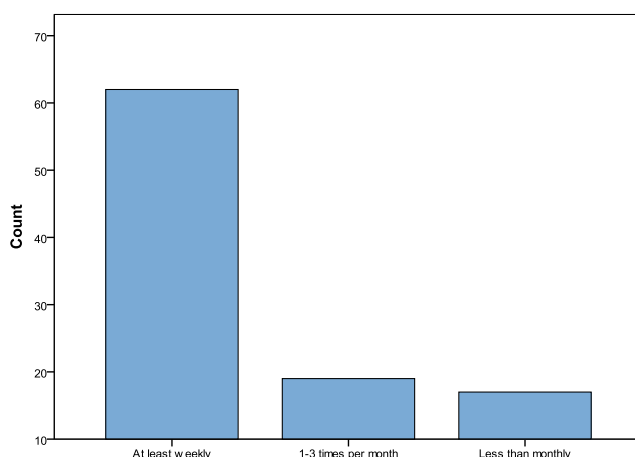
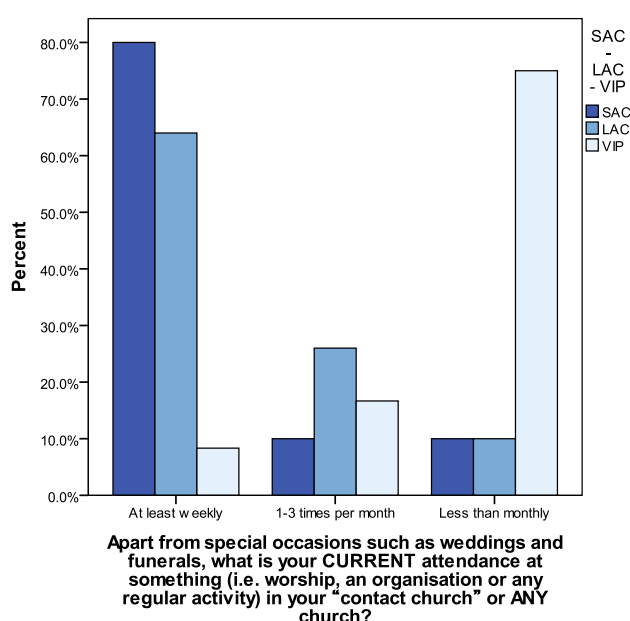


Figure 7.5 Frequency of church attendance (n=98)



	SAC			LAC			VIP		
	Count	Column N %	Table N %	Count	Column N %	Table N %	Count	Column N %	Table N %
At least weekly	24	80.0%	26.1%	32	64.0%	34.8%	1	8.3%	1.1%
2-3 times per month	3	10.0%	3.3%	7	14.0%	7.6%	1	8.3%	1.1%
About monthly				6	12.0%	6.5%	1	8.3%	1.1%
3 or more times a year	3	10.0%	3.3%	3	6.0%	3.3%	5	41.7%	5.4%
Twice per year or less				2	4.0%	2.2%	2	16.7%	2.2%
Never							2	16.7%	2.2%
Total	30	100.0%	32.6%	50	100.0%	54.3%	12	100.0%	13.0%

Table 7.1 Church attendance by reported faith

(Apart from special occasions such as weddings & funerals what is your CURRENT attendance at something in ANY church)

It is worth noting that males are slightly more likely than females to attend church weekly (70.6% in comparison to 59.4%). Figure 7.7 also shows that weekly attendance is also slightly more common in South and West regions, (both around 70% in comparison to around 60% in the other regions), whereas East has the highest proportion who attend less than monthly (almost a quarter compared to the average of 17% and only 5.9% in South). Weekly attendance level varies minimally according to Location and Size of congregation, though those from Urban congregations were more likely to attend less than monthly (figure 7.8).

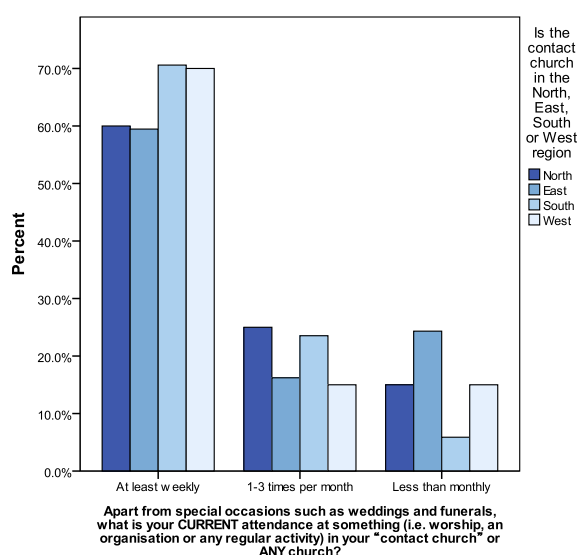


Figure 7.7 Church attendance by region (n=94)

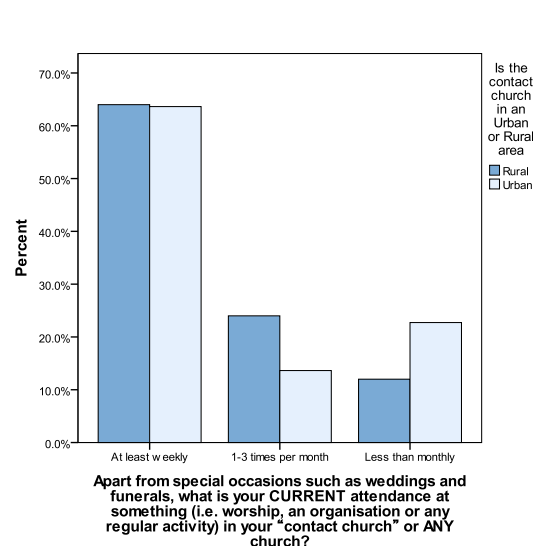


Figure 7.8 Church attendance by location (n=94)

Factors in faithfulness or lack of faithfulness

Some interesting observations can be made when the faith and behaviour of those who have lived away from home is examined in comparison to those who have always stayed at home. 51.1% of respondents have lived away from home (i.e. not with either or both parent) to study or work, males being less likely to live away from home (56%) than were females (46%) (figure 7.9).

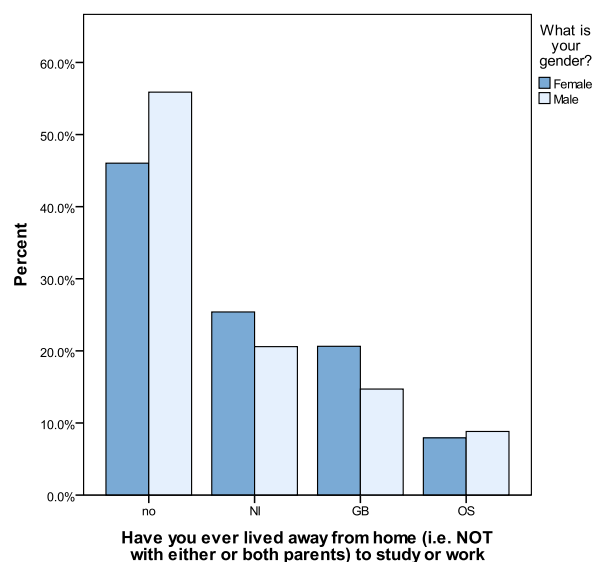


Figure 7.9 Living away from home by gender (n=97)

When considering these patterns according to the stated level of faith of the respondents, SACs were more likely to have lived away from home (56.7% compared to 44.0% of LACs) but 66.7% of VIPs also did so (figure 7.10).

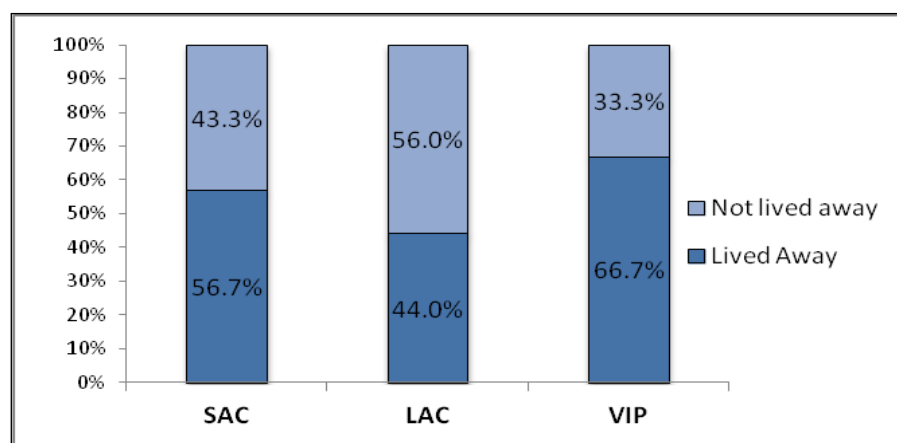


Figure 7.10 Reported faith by living away from home (n=92)

Although the numbers are not large, it suggests that those who go away to work or study in GB may tend to either grow in their faith or fall away altogether. There was little difference between the proportion of LACs and SACs who lived away from home in NI but 20.0% of SACs lived away in GB compared to 12.0% of LACs and 41.7% of VIPs, suggesting that greater distance can also have a polarising but perhaps negative effect on faith. Put another way, 62.2% of those who stay at home and 56.5% of those who live away but within N.I. are LACs, but only 35.3% of those who live in GB are LACs.

Some of the interviewees touched on the significance of living away from home. Andy spoke at length about his struggle before deciding to study away from home, where he is part of a close family and church community, admitting that he took a while to settle into a church where he is studying. Referring to his imminent return, he said *'I am going and I am following God's path but I am not doing it with my whole heart... I know he wants me to be there but I think it's very much a struggle between what's my will and what's His will'*.

Andy referred to cultural differences between GB and Northern Ireland *'people are probably a lot more open about their faith than they are here but a lot more people there are anti-Christianity'. I just thought about leaving home and everything I was leaving behind rather than all these new experiences and new challenges I was going to get, but whenever I went away - drink is massive!* Helen also referred to the culture shock of living and studying away from home; *'Uni has been great, it has been a real learning curve too, just because when you live in (my town), you are sort of in a bubble and then you go to uni and people's attitudes, Christians attitudes change towards so many things'*.

Helen and Andy highlighted the importance of supportive Christian friends for enduring faith in such a situation; Helen said *'It's just a real culture shock and I really struggled with that for a while but then God provided Lynda and then I had her and then I got a small group'*.

Laura was aware of some of these issues as she prepared to head off to university for the first time; *'I would be looking for a church similar to Woodside, somewhere where, like a family kind of church, where there's older people... I am looking forward to the CU and getting to know other Christians in university'*

The positive impact of living away from home was also highlighted, as for example Neil described the benefits of a Gap Year experience: *'Took a year out, and went to (overseas) for 6 months... That's going to have played a massive part of the reason why I'm still connected to God...'* Helen, however, was honest enough to admit that she may not have coped well with living away from home; *'I am glad I didn't go to (England); I probably would have loved it but I might not be where I am now, I am glad I went to (university in NI), that was definitely the way for me to go.'*

The respondents who were no longer involved in their contact church were asked to identify the most important factors declared for this. Of those who completed this question, 41.2% left because they moved residence or chose to move churches for positive reasons. Of the others, 29.4% said their lack of attendance was due to lack of faith, but the remaining 29.4% had more complex reasons: they no longer felt they belonged, they drifted away or they felt they had to move due to something they had done.

There were a number of opportunities to respond to open questions relating to what made a difference to their continued involvement in church; some seemed to raise issues which they had personally experienced and others highlighted experiences they would like to have in future to encourage their continued involvement. Some of these will be discussed subsequently under specific headings, but a desire to see their own spiritual growth featured among the answers, such as these examples:

- *My desire to grow in my Christian faith through the teaching of God's word.*
- *As long as the Bible is preached truthfully with a passion to see people saved through Jesus Christ*
- *Feeling like I'm getting somewhere. It is sometimes hard to be allowed to reach the kids on a real level. Youth Ministry in our church can be too focussed on involving them and making it fun, and not teaching or building on anything that is real.*

When asked for more general comments how 18-25s can be kept close to churches, answers included: groups specifically for that age-group; support from the congregation; intergenerational relationships; accessibility of preaching and worship; having a voice or opportunity to influence; people making the effort to keep in touch with them; effective outreach; spiritual nurture. Some of these quotes are cited under the relevant sections to

come, but the following illustrate a few wider comments, many of which showed great insight and reflection:

- *Make it more accessible, many non-Christians don't feel they could join a church because they have to fit a certain stereotype. Street reach seems to work better if the message is about love, not about damning them to hell.*
- *We are already starting to lose two of the older members of the youth group who are 16 and 17. They have been involved in the church since a young age, but they were never taught, they have little understanding of the Bible, of how and why to pray and of how to act around their Non-Christian friends. I was in the same position before my gap year.*
- *Love them like God loves them, preach the gospel and bring them daily before him in prayer. Trust that the Lord is building his church.*

There was an optimism expressed by a number of respondents as illustrated by these quotes:

- *I hope that I will remain committed and involved in my current church unless there is a great change in my circumstances e.g. if I move for employment after I graduate.*
- *Currently I am living away from home, so involvement in my contact church is limited. However I am likely to remain involved with a church, even if it is not my contact church, in the future.*
- *nothing could make me leave*

A few were more negative in their free comments, however:

- *I would not be persuaded to join again.*
- *Knowing that if I went I would feel welcome and part of the church instead of feeling like I am not good enough or people are judging me or looking at me in a certain way. Going to church should be about God and faith not feeling these sorts of things*
- *It should not be about keeping people of that certain age bracket at church, by the time young people reach 18 they start to grow up and think more for themselves and realise there are other views on the world and that Christianity is maybe not the answer for them.*

Family

The influence of family was considered in four broad areas: the past and present relationship between respondents and their parents, their parents' expression of their own faith, faith practices within the family, and the influence of wider family. These areas cannot easily be untwined as they are clearly very much part of family patterns growing up, but it is important to isolate certain specific aspects of family influence and some of these proved to be very interesting.

Relationship with parents

Around 40% of the sample described their relationship with both their mother and their father when they were 11-18 as 'very close'. When describing this relationship as it was currently, over 50% describe their relationship with their mother as 'very close' whereas those who have a 'very close' relationship with their father now is only marginally more than when they were 11-18. There does not appear to be a discernible association between respondent's relationship with either parent when they were 11-18 and their current church attendance or their expression of their own faith. However SACs were more likely to describe their *current* relationship with their mother as 'very close' (70.0% compared to 46.0% of LACs, figure 7.11) and those who attend church weekly were more likely than those who attend 1-3 times per month to describe a similarly close relationship with their mother (58.1% compared to 42.1%), (figure 7.12). Of course, this may simply mean that those with a stronger faith or those who attend church regularly are more likely to work harder at their relationship with their mother, but the link itself is interesting, especially as a similar pattern is not found in terms of relationship to father.

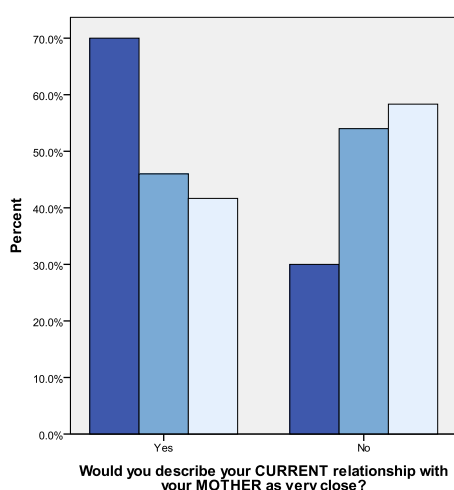


Figure 7.11 Current relationship with mother by faith (n=92)

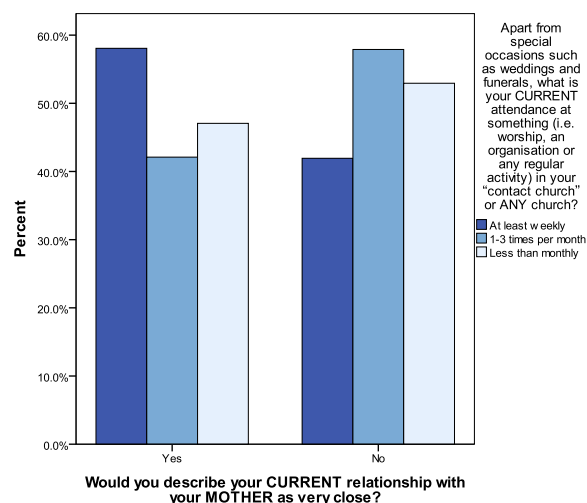
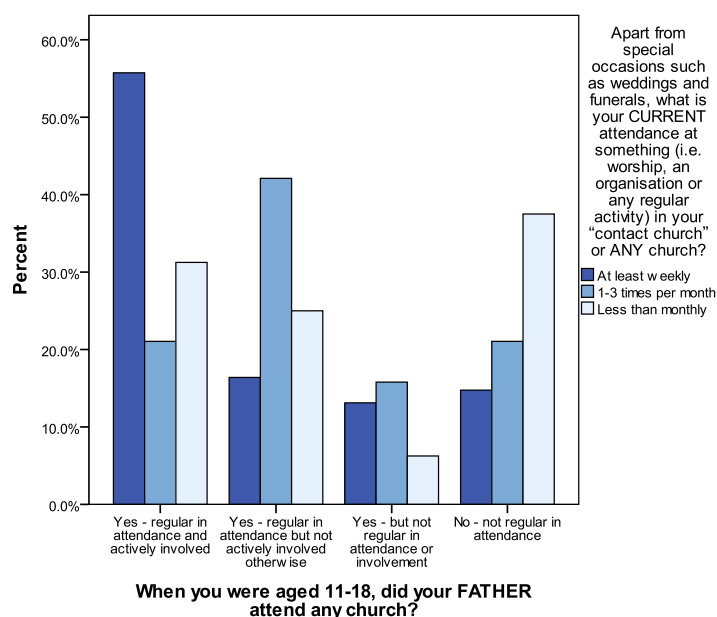


Figure 7.12 Current relationship with mother by church attendance (n=97)

Parents' faith and behaviour

Respondents were asked about the church attendance patterns of their parents and 67.7% said that when they were 11-18, their father regularly attended church, including 43.3% whose fathers were also actively involved in the church. A higher proportion of respondents, (78.2%), said that when they were 11-18 their mother regularly attended church and 55.4% also said their mothers were actively involved in the church.

Regarding current respondents' church attendance, 55.7% of those attending church weekly



said their father "now attends church regularly *and* is actively involved", compared to only 21.1% of those who attend 1-3 times per month. Only 16.4% of those who now attend weekly have fathers who were only regular in attendance but not actively involved, in contrast to 42.1% of those attending 1-3 times per month, (figure 7.13 / table 7.2).

Figure 7.13 Father's attendance (11-18) by attendance now (n=96)

When you were aged 11-18, did your FATHER attend any church?	Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, what is your CURRENT attendance at something (i.e. worship, an organisation or any regular							
	At least weekly		1-3 times per month		Less than monthly		Total	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Yes - regular in attendance and actively involved	34	55.7%	4	21.1%	5	31.3%	43	44.8%
Yes - regular in attendance but not actively involved	10	16.4%	8	42.1%	4	25.0%	22	22.9%
Yes - but not regular in attendance or involvement	8	13.1%	3	15.8%	1	6.3%	12	12.5%
No - not regular in attendance	9	14.8%	4	21.1%	6	37.5%	19	19.8%
Total	61	100.0%	19	100.0%	16	100.0%	96	100.0%

Table 7.2 Father's church attendance by current church attendance (n=96)

This suggests that the association between an individual's current church attendance and their father's church attendance growing up must be accompanied by the father's active involvement to make an impact; in other words the strength of the influence of the father's church attendance was in his active involvement, not just his attendance. It is also interesting to note that almost a third of those who now attend less than monthly also said their father is regular in attendance and involvement, which suggests that the father's outward behaviour is not the only important variable but that other factors, such as his relationship with his child, may influence future behaviour of the emerging adult offspring.

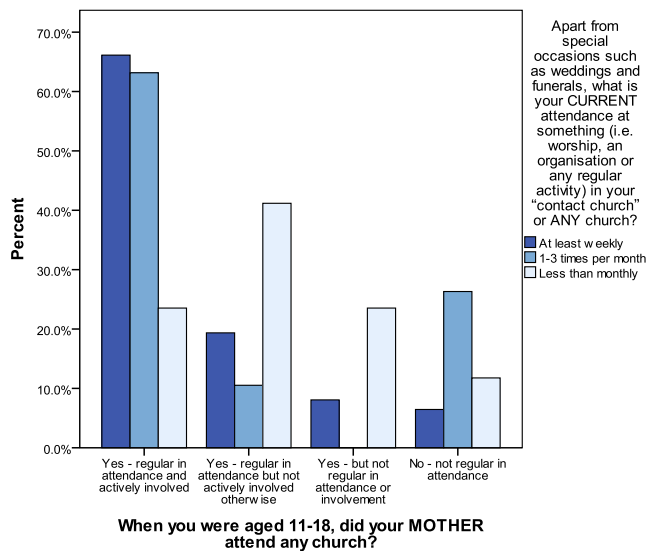


Figure 7.14 Mother's attendance (11-18) by attendance now (n=98)

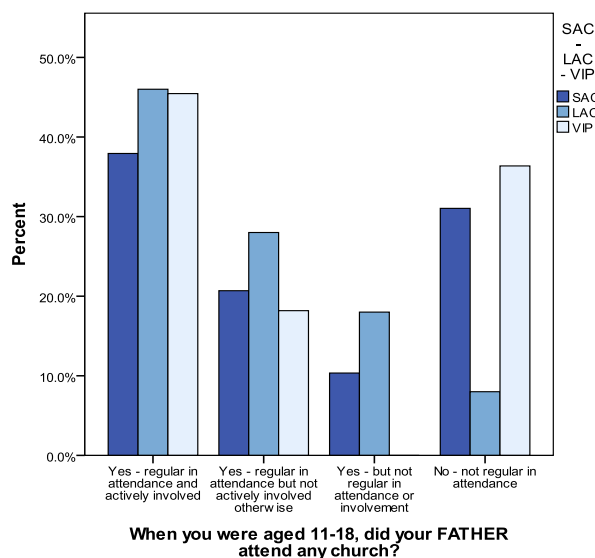


Figure 7.15 Father's attendance (11-18) by reported faith (n=90)

There was a different pattern between the attendance of respondents' mothers and the attendance of their children, (figure 7.14); those who now attend weekly and those who attend 1-3 times per month were almost as likely to have a mother who was active in attendance and involvement when they were 11-18. It is also notable that over a quarter of those who now attend church 1-3 times per month said their mother did not attend church regularly when they were 11-18.

However, any impact of father's church involvement on the church attendance seems not to be mirrored in its influence on the faith of the offspring. Surprisingly, only 37.9% of SACs said their father attended and was involved and 20.7% said their father simply attended; this compares to 46% and 28% respectively for LACs (figure 7.15 / table 7.3). So those with a stronger faith were less likely to have a father who

attended church when they were growing up, even if the father was actively involved.

When you were aged 11-18, did your FATHER attend any church?	SAC		LAC		VIP		Total	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Yes - regular in attendance and actively involved	11	37.9%	23	46.0%	5	45.5%	39	43.3%
Yes - regular in attendance but not actively involved otherwise	6	20.7%	14	28.0%	2	18.2%	22	24.4%
Yes - but not regular in attendance or involvement	3	10.3%	9	18.0%	0	.0%	12	13.3%
No - not regular in attendance	9	31.0%	4	8.0%	4	36.4%	17	18.9%
Total	29	100.0%	50	100.0%	11	100.0%	90	100.0%

Table 7.3 Father's church attendance by reported faith (n=90)

In fact, 31% of SACs said their father did not attend church at all, compared to 8.0% of LACs; 41.3% of SACs had fathers who were not regularly involved in church at all. This may say more about the strength of faith of the respondent than any influence of their father and, as above, may suggest that other factors such as the relationship with the father may come into play.

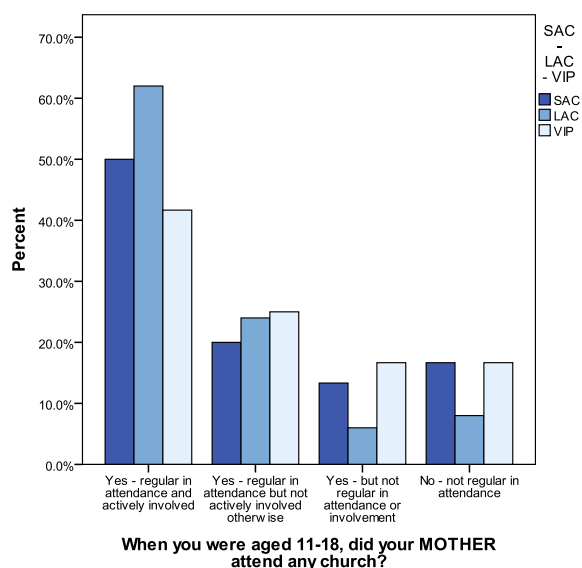


Figure 7.16 Mother's attendance (11-18) by reported faith (n=98)

church attendance of their emerging adult children, but that complex variables are at work.

The questionnaire also looked at the current faith of respondents' parents in relation to the faith and church attendance of their children. 7 categories were given to describe parent's faith and these were collapsed into 4 for clarity and because of the smaller number of responses in some categories²⁹. Mothers were more likely to be described as having an 'Outstanding or strong and open faith' (44.1% compared to 30.5% of fathers) and conversely, fathers were more likely to be described as 'Uncommitted' (25% compared to 11.8% of mothers). These were then correlated with correspondents' church attendance and faith, with some interesting results.

Respondents who attended church weekly were more likely to say that their father's current faith is 'Outstanding or strong and open' (37.2% compared to 11.1% who attend 1 to 3 times per month). In contrast, those who attended 1-3 times per month were more likely to say that their father was currently a Christian 'but not very vocal or expressive of his faith' (44.4% compared to 25.4% for those who attend weekly). 1/3 of those attending 1-3 per month or

There was a similar pattern in relation to mother's attendance patterns, as 70% of SACs said their mothers attended church regularly, including 50% who were also actively involved, but 86% of LACs said their mothers are regular attendees, including 62% of those who were also actively involved (figure 7.16). It is difficult to draw any useful conclusions from this data, except that there are clearly no straightforward connections between the church involvement of parents and the resulting faith and

²⁹ 'Outstanding Christian faith and often influences others' was combined with 'Strong Christian who lives out his/her faith openly'; 'Has been involved in church but is unclear if he/she has a specific Christian belief' was combined with 'Once had an active faith but no longer a big part of his/her life'; (to 'Formerly committed') and 'Has never claimed to be a Christian but is relaxed about faith' was combined with 'Is actively opposed to Christian faith or actively believes in something different' (to 'Uncommitted').

less than monthly had a father who was described as ‘Uncommitted’ (compared to 20.4% of those who attend weekly) and, interestingly, none of those who attend less than monthly had a father who was ‘committed but not very vocal’ but a quarter did have fathers with ‘outstanding or strong and open faith’ (figure 7.17 / table 7.4). This again suggests that although there is a relationship between the respondent’s church attendance and their father’s faith, it is not simple.

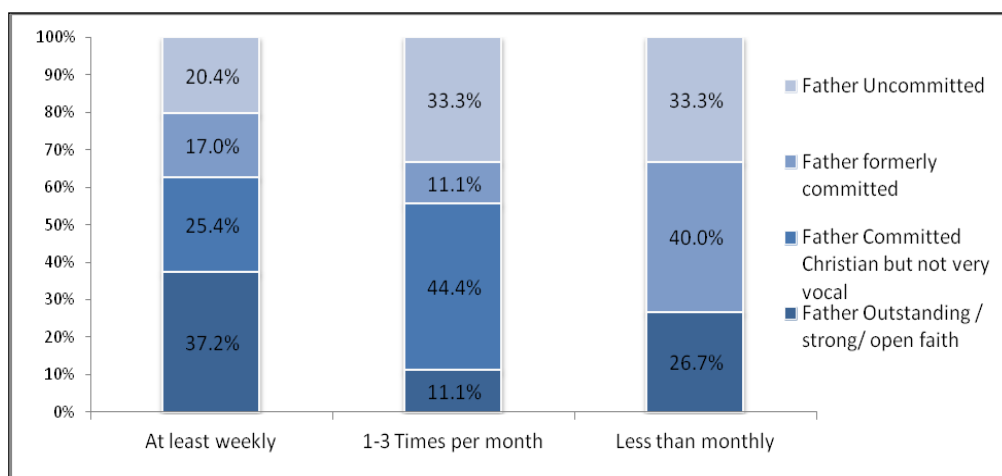


Figure 7.17 Father's current faith by respondent's attendance (n = 92)

Apart from special occasions, what is your CURRENT attendance at something in your 'contact church' or ANY church?								
Which one of these statements BEST describes your FATHER'S faith now?	At least weekly		1-3 times per month		Less than monthly		Total	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Outstanding or strong & open	22	37.2%	2	11.1%	4	26.7%	28	30.5%
Christian faith								
Committed Christian but not	15	25.4%	8	44.4%	0	.0%	23	25.0%
very vocal or expressive of his								
Formerly committed	10	17.0%	2	11.1%	6	40.0%	18	19.5%
Uncommitted	12	20.4%	6	33.3%	5	33.3%	23	25.0%
Total	59	100.0%	18	100.0%	15	100.0%	92	100.0%

Table 7.4 – Father's current faith by attendance (n = 92)

This pattern was even more notable in relation to mothers' faith: if a respondent attended church weekly they are much more likely to have a mother whose current faith is 'outstanding or strong and open' (56.7%, compared with 17.6% of those who attend 1 to 3 times per month). Similarly to fathers, those who attended 1-3 times per month were more likely to have a mother who is currently a Christian 'but not very vocal or expressive of her faith' (35.3% compared to 25.0% for those who attend weekly) and a quarter of those who attended less than monthly also had mothers with 'outstanding or strong and open faith' (figure 7.18 / table 7.5).

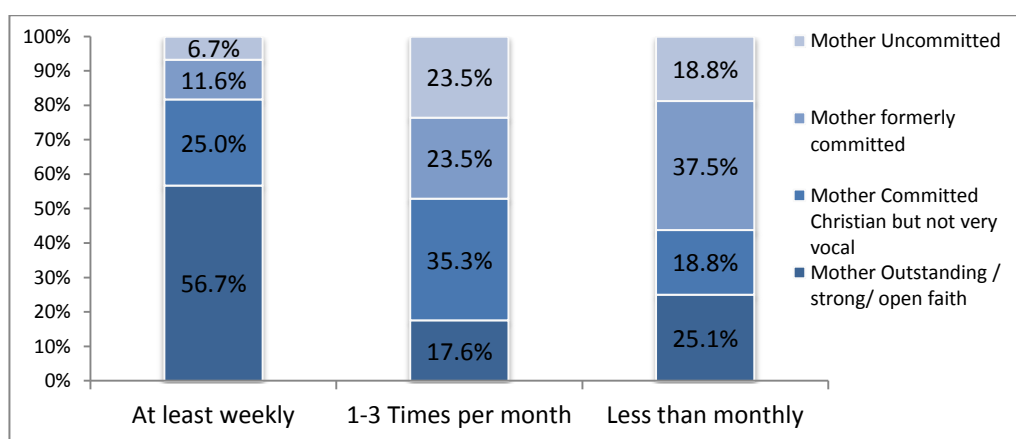


Figure 7.18 Mother's current faith by respondent's attendance (n=93)

Apart from special occasions, what is your CURRENT attendance at something in your 'contact church' or ANY church?								
Which one of these statements BEST describes your MOTHER'S faith now?	At least weekly		1-3 times per month		Less than monthly		Total	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Outstanding or strong & open Christian faith	34	56.7%	3	17.6%	4	25.1%	41	44.1%
Committed Christian but not very vocal or expressive of his	15	25.0%	6	35.3%	3	18.8%	24	25.8%
Formerly committed	7	11.6%	4	23.5%	6	37.5%	17	18.3%
Uncommitted	4	6.7%	4	23.5%	3	18.8%	11	11.8%
Total	60	100.0%	17	100.0%	16	100.0%	93	100.0%

Table 7.5 Mother's current faith by respondent's attendance (n = 93)

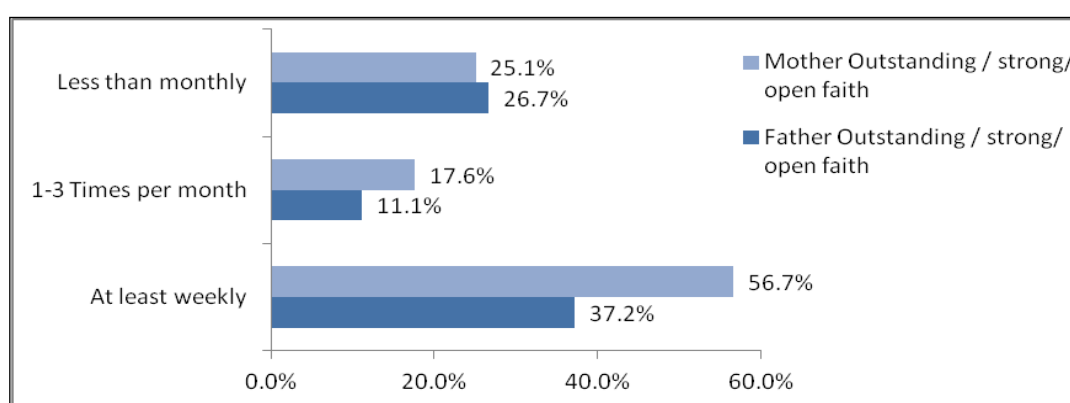


Figure 7.19 – Parent's current faith by respondent's attendance

The one interesting comparison between fathers and mothers in this area is with those who attend church weekly; only two thirds had fathers with 'outstanding or strong and open faith' compared with mothers with similar mothers (figure 7.19). This may be an indicator that it is the faith of mothers which is more likely than that of fathers to encourage their emerging adult children to remain involved in church on a weekly basis.

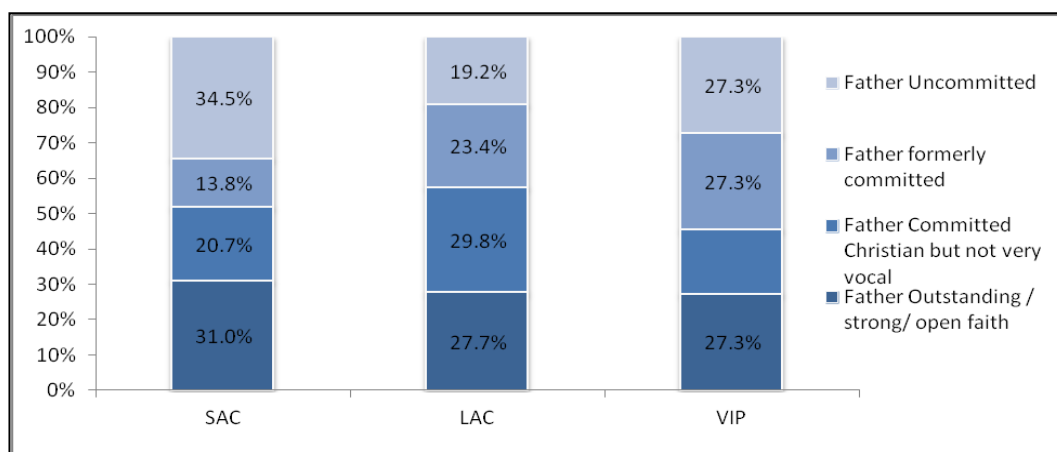


Figure 7.20 Father's current faith by respondent's faith (n=92)

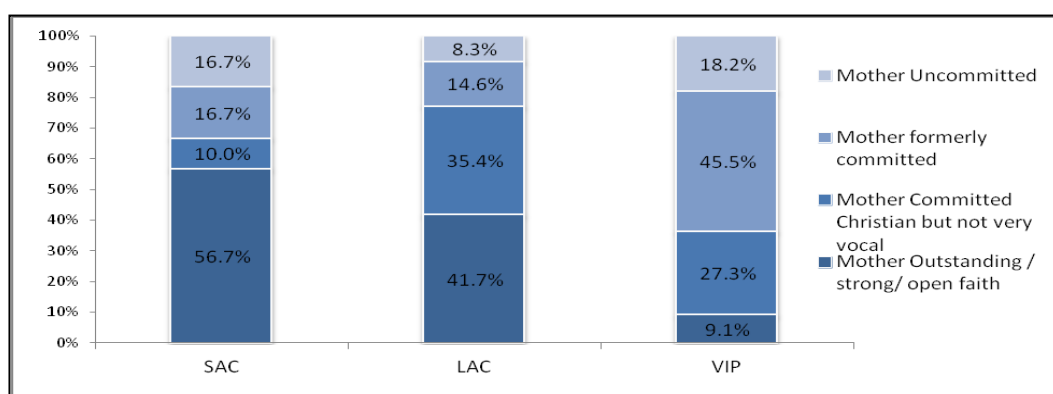


Figure 7.21 Mother's current faith by respondent's faith (n=93)

Patterns were similar in direction but less clear when comparing the reported faith of respondents to their father's current faith; SAC's mothers were more likely than LAC's to have an outstanding or strong and open faith (56.7% SACs compared to 41.7% LAC's); this includes 36.7% of SAC's mothers being in the second category compared to 25% of LAC's mothers. LAC's fathers were more likely than SACs to currently be a Christian 'but not very vocal or expressive of his faith' (29.8% compared to 20.7% SACs). However, LACs were much more likely than SACs to say that their mother was currently a Christian 'but not very vocal or expressive of his faith' (35.4% compared to 10.0% SACs) (figures 7.20 & 7.21).

Though there was little correlation between church attendance & their father's church membership, LAC's fathers were surprisingly much more likely to belong to their Contact Church (86.0% compared to 50.0% for SACs). Similarly, LAC's mothers were more likely to belong to their Contact Church (91.8% compared to 70.0% for SACs). Notably, 4 out of 10 SACs fathers did not attend church (figures 7.22 and 7.23)

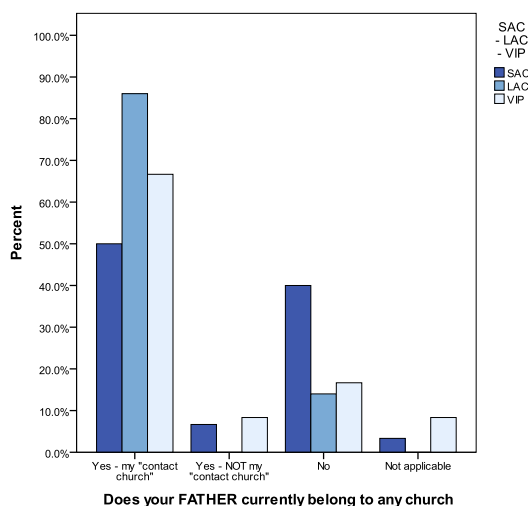


Figure 7.22 Father's attendance by respondent's faith (n=92)

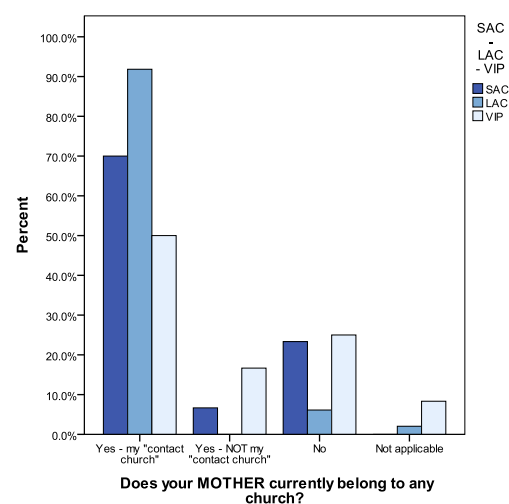


Figure 7.23 Mother's attendance by respondent's faith (n=93)

A number of the interviewees made reference to being uncertain about the faith of their parents, in particular fathers'. Amy was one of these and said:

'My dad I always question, he always read me Bible stories when I was wee and everything and send me to church but he very rarely goes to church...I have conversations with him and he just sort of says I don't need to go to church to be a Christian, I say 'yeah, but it helps'. You know sometimes it can slide....'

Andy too expressed cautious reservations about his father's faith:

*I love my dad, I get on so well with him and he is like my best friend as well but I don't know, we don't talk about it that much. **Is he involved in church?** Not in a leadership role, it is quite hard because he has got a job that requires him to do work on Sunday's sometimes...I don't know whether it's like... men almost think it is an unmanly thing to do, but my dad's not a hard man or anything but...'*

Becca no longer professes to be a Christian but believes her mother still has faith and that her father's faith is nominal; *'my granny and granda were quite strong believers and very involved in the church. I sort of believe that my daddy's faith was more to do with keeping them happy... my dad would just go to church and come home on a Sunday and that would be it'.*

David has drifted from church somewhat and referred to his mother having a 'good faith', though she did not express it in ways other than attending Sunday worship. However he also said *'I sometimes wonder about my dad'* and referred to a comment his father had made about a natural history documentary which expressed doubt about divine creation; he added *'But sometimes he will still put his faith squarely on the table and say yes I do believe in that. He'd just throw a comment here and there now and again and that type of thing.'* David also spoke about his parents' lack of an explicit faith; *'Their faith wasn't massively noticeable. It wasn't out for everyone to see. If you came to the house you wouldn't have been aware that this is a church-going family'.*

Helen went even further and cited parental influence as being an impediment to her faith; when asked what she thought had been most damaging to her faith:

'In a way it's nearly family, and that is a really strange answer and I know that my family send me to everything and anything. It is daddy that frustrates me about people seating on seats and daddy who falls out with people who are fighting for a new church, in a way that is where my whole frustration started and all you were hearing about church is negative but you know he isn't prepared to do anything about it because this is what we have always done, this is tradition'.

Clearly some of the interviewees had extremely strong and positive relationships with their parents. Andy joked *'My mum is like my best friend - I know how sad is that I am never going to get girlfriend!'* Amy referred to the fact that her mother brought her up to never blame God for difficult things in life but to trust Him for what she needed. She also referred to another life and faith lesson her mum taught her very practically; *'if we were having an argument, mum would just start to pray in the middle of the argument and then that would change the tone of the situation'.*

Despite growing up in a home where her parents did not share her faith, Laura said she was not conscious of this until the time when she was asked to give her testimony at a G.B. display when her parents would be present and only then was she aware of her different beliefs, as her parents had been so supportive and close to her. *'so it is a weird kind of relationship I have with them like I know most people when say that their parents aren't Christians they are always, 'oh, I'm sure that's difficult for you', but mine have been so supportive and I think I have had it kind of easy with them if you know what I mean...'* Neil also told how his strong faith was not shared by his parents; *'Dad's own personal opinion is nothing, God doesn't exist that's that. Mum's opinion is, I guess, that God does exist, but it's about....that's maybe is another thing, it is a very personal thing with mum and there was a very personal thing with me...'* He shared how his mother's sense of keeping a private faith had influenced his personal expression of faith until recently also.

Family practice

The questionnaires sought to ascertain the place of faith and what kinds of spiritual practices were common when the respondents were growing up as children and teenagers. Only 19.8% of respondents said faith was 'part of everyday family life' growing up, with 52.1% that it was 'important but not always explicit' (figure 7.24).

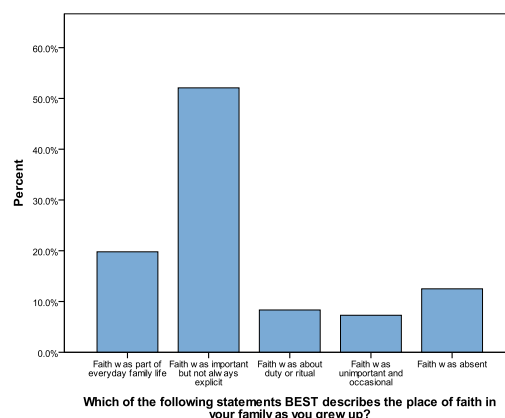
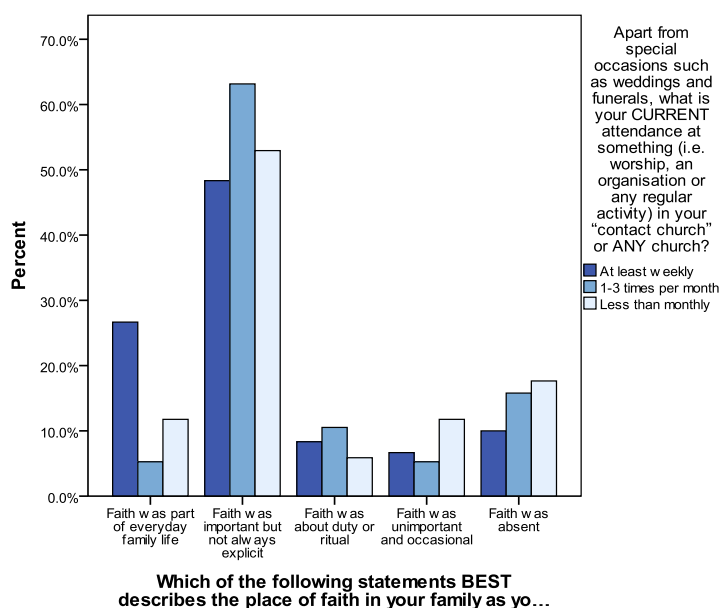


Figure 7.24 Place of faith in family growing up (n=96)



26.7% of those who now attend church at least weekly said faith was 'part of everyday life' in their families, compared to only 5.3% of those who attend 1-3 times per month and 11.3% of those who attend less often (figure 7.25). However there were no significant patterns in respect of the respondents reported faith.

Figure 7.25 Place of faith in family growing up by current attendance (n=95)

Parents were reported to be very helpful in faith for 22.3% of respondents, rising to 68% who found them helpful or very helpful (figure 7.26). Of those who attended church weekly, 29.3% said their parents were 'very helpful' compared to just 11.1% of those who attend 1-3 times per month (figure 7.27).

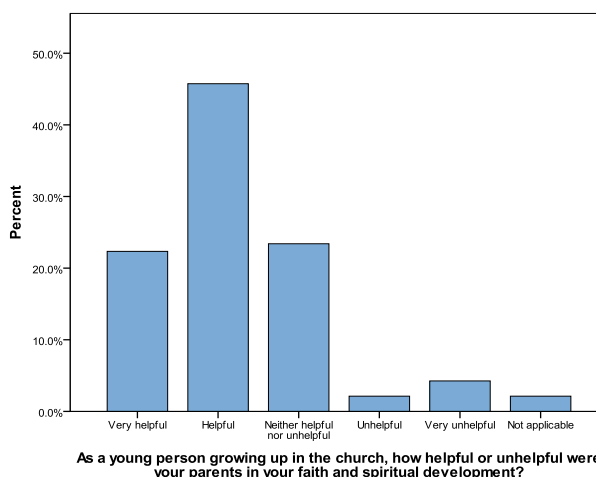
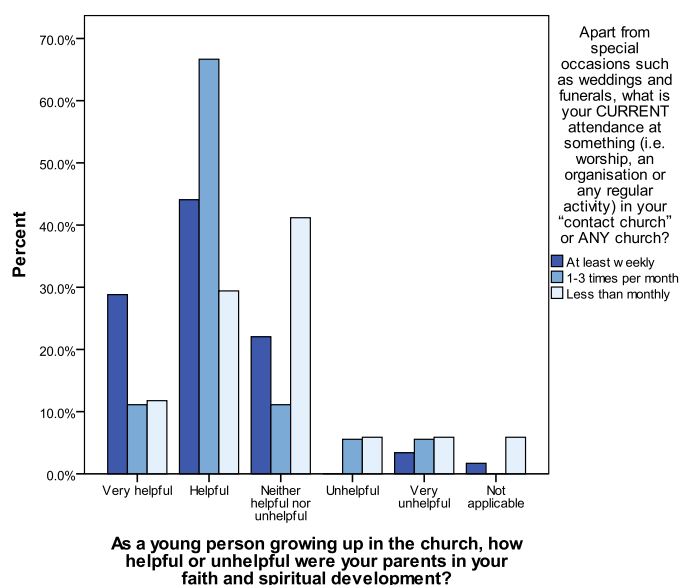


Figure 7.26 helpfulness of parents growing up (n=94)

The pattern in relation to faith was complex, as 30.0% of SACs said this compared to 22.0% of LACs; however, combining 'helpful' & 'very helpful', the total was only 53.3% for SACs and 78.0% for LACs (figure 7.28).

Figure 7.27 helpfulness of parents by current attendance (n=93)



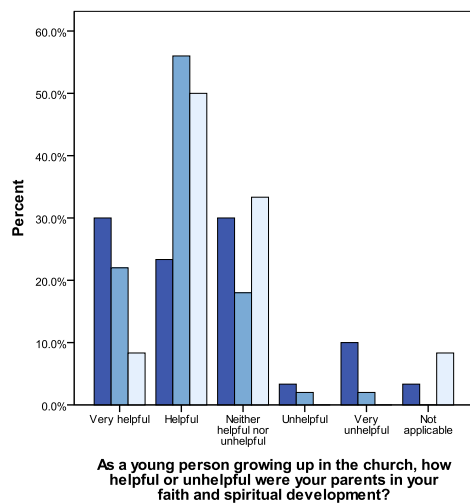


Figure 7.28 helpfulness of parents by faith (n=92)

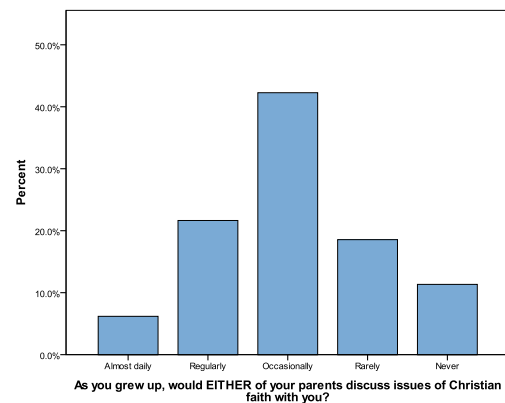


Figure 7.29 frequency of parents discussing faith growing up (n=97)

Only 6.2% of respondents said their parents talked about faith ‘almost daily’ growing up, 21.6% regularly, meaning almost ¾ discussed faith in the home only occasionally or less often (figure 7.29). Little association is evident with current church attendance or reported faith, but low numbers makes this difficult.

Generally speaking when you were a child (u11), how often did your family attend church together	At least weekly		1-3 times per month		Less than monthly		Total	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Very regularly	45	73.8%	9	47.4%	8	47.1%	62	63.9%
Fairly often	5	8.2%	4	21.1%	2	11.8%	11	11.3%
Occasionally	4	6.6%	0	.0%	1	5.9%	5	5.2%
Rarely	3	4.9%	4	21.1%	4	23.5%	11	11.3%
Never	4	6.6%	2	10.5%	2	11.8%	8	8.2%
Total	61	100.0%	19	100.0%	17	100.0%	97	100.0%

Table 7.6 – Church attendance (u11) by attendance now (n = 97)

63.9% of respondents said they went to church ‘very regularly’ as a family when aged under 11, falling to 57.3% when 11-18. Almost ¾ of those who now attend church weekly had that experience as a child (u11), compared to just under half of those who attended church 1-3 times per month or less frequently, so regular church attendance as a family when a child seems to tend to endure into early adulthood (table 7.6, figure 7.30). This pattern seems to have been just as important as teenagers, when regular family church attendance was experienced over 2/3 of weekly attendees compared to 42.1% of those attending 1-3 times per month and just over a third of those attending less regularly (table 7.7, figure 7.31).

Generally speaking when you were a teenager (11-18), how often did your family attend church together	At least weekly		1-3 times per month		Less than monthly		Total	
	Count	Column N	Count	Column N	Count	Column N	Count	Column N
		%		%		%		%
Very regularly	41	68.3%	8	42.1%	6	35.3%	55	57.3%
Fairly often	6	10.0%	5	26.3%	2	11.8%	13	13.5%
Occasionally	3	5.0%	0	.0%	1	5.9%	4	4.2%
Rarely	6	10.0%	4	21.1%	7	41.2%	17	17.7%
Never	4	6.7%	2	10.5%	1	5.9%	7	7.3%
Total	60	100.0%	19	100.0%	17	100.0%	96	100.0%

Table 7.7 – Church attendance (11-18) by attendance now (n = 96)

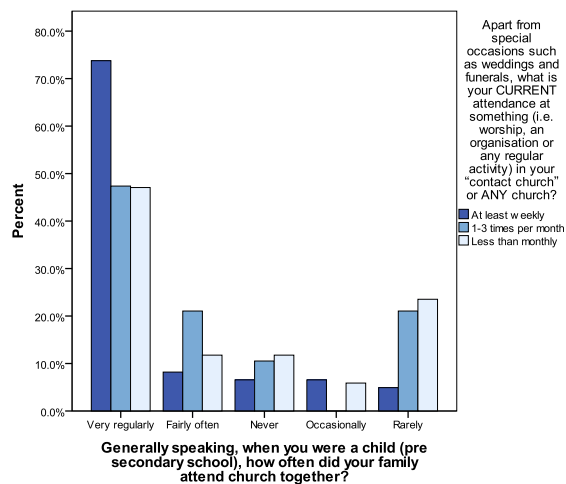


Figure 7.30 church attendance (u11) by attendance now (n=97)

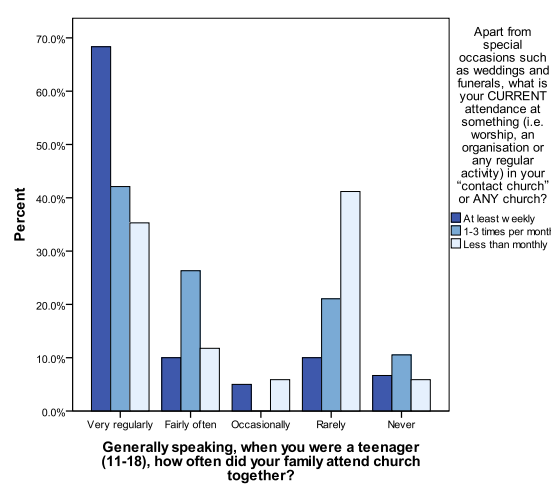


Figure 7.31 church attendance (11-18) by attendance now (n=96)

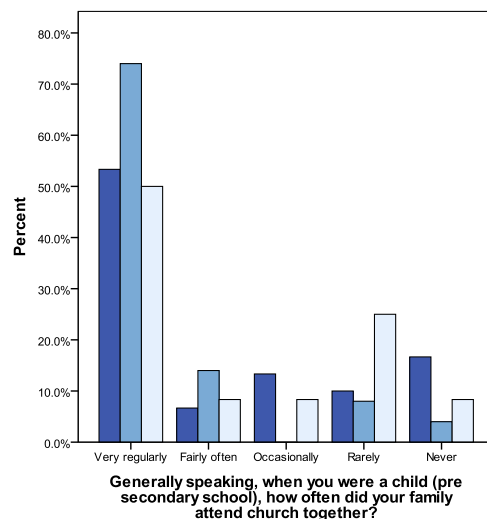


Figure 7.32 church attendance (u11) by faith now (n=92)

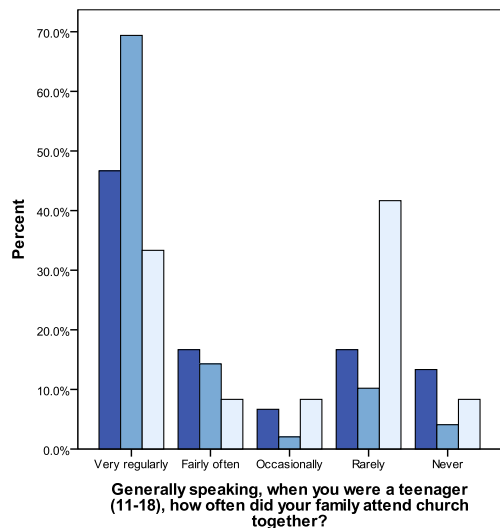


Figure 7.33 church attendance (11-18) by faith now (n=92)

The patterns were less expected when applied to SAC/LAC faith, however, (figure 7.32 and 7.33), with indications that LACs were more likely to come from families who attended church together 'very regularly' both as a child and a teen. Thus establishing church attendance as a

child or teenager may encourage later attendance patterns, but not necessarily a stronger faith. Perhaps this pattern may relate to other issues such as whether they felt coerced to go to church as children and teenagers, and this area was also examined by the questionnaires.

Respondents were asked to give the main reason they went to church when they were 12 or

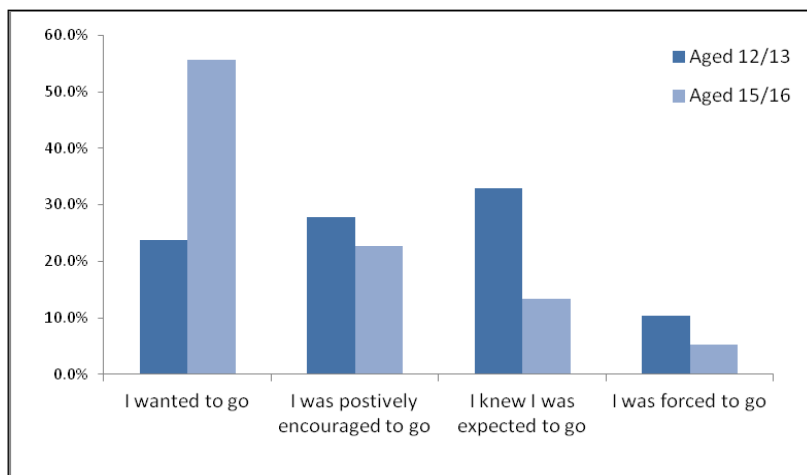


Figure 7.34 main reasons for attending church by age (n=97)

13 and also at 15 or 16 so changes in attitude over time could be tracked. Only 10.3% of those aged 12 or 13 and 5.2% of those aged 15 or 16 were forced to go to church (figure 7.34).

There was a large increase in those attending church because they wanted to as they became older teenagers. 23.7% said they attended because they wanted to when they were aged 12 or 13, but 55.7% said this was the case by the time they were aged 15 or 16. Those who went because they knew they were expected to decreased over time from 33.0% when they were

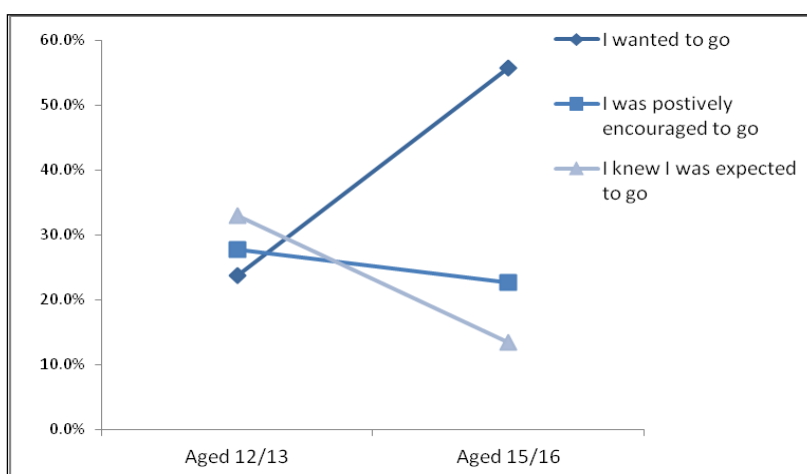


Figure 7.35 changes in main reasons for attending church (n=97)

aged 12 or 13 to only 13.4% when they were 15 or 16. Over the same time period, those who went because they were positively encouraged to go to church fell a little from 27.8% to 22.7% (figure 7.35).

Over twice as many of those who now attend church weekly went when they were 15 or 16 because they wanted to, compared to of those who now attend 1-3 times per month (65.5% and 31.6% respectively, figure 7.37). However, only 24.6% of those who attend weekly now attended because they wanted to when they were or 12 are 24.6%, (compared to 15.8% of those who attend 1-3 times per month, figure 7.36). This suggests that those who have the desire to attend for their own reasons may have this established by the age of 15 or 16.

However, as before, the situation is not simple as 47.1% of those who attend less than monthly also said they attended by their own wishes when they were 15 or 16 (figure 7.37).

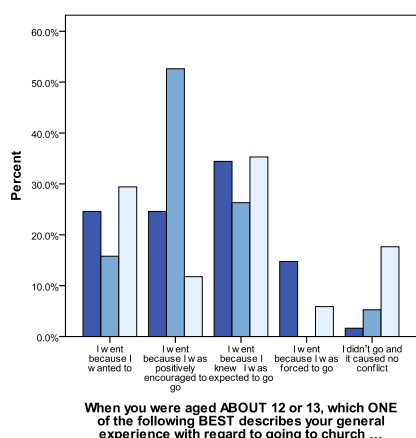


Figure 7.36 reasons for church attendance (u11) by attend. now (n=97)

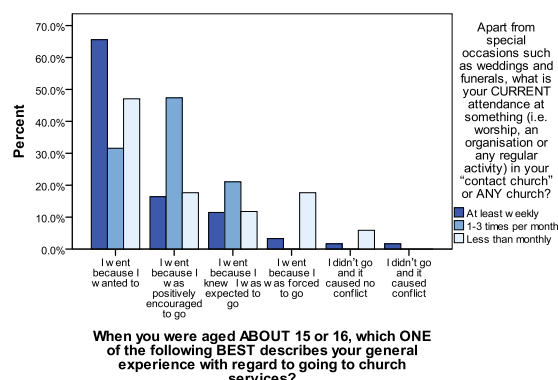


Figure 7.37 reasons for church attendance (11-18) by attend. now (n=97)

52.6% of those who now attend church 1-3 times per month went because they were 'positively encouraged to' aged 12 or 13 and 47.4% when they were 15 or 16. This applies to only 24.6% and 16.4% respectively of those who now attend weekly. This may suggest that the desire is engrained in the young people, though the interpretation of 'positively encouraged' would be interesting further investigation. Perhaps some have a habit which has been engrained in them, without leading to a self-motivated desire to do so, such that when circumstances change, attendance drops.

Patterns of family worship and devotion are reported to be generally low. Only 14.4% of respondents said they very regularly prayed together at mealtimes as a family when they were a child and 7.2% fairly often; this became 10.4% and 8.3% by the time respondents were 11-18. The practice of prayers at bedtime was also rare when respondents were children and this became even less frequent as teenagers (figure 7.39).

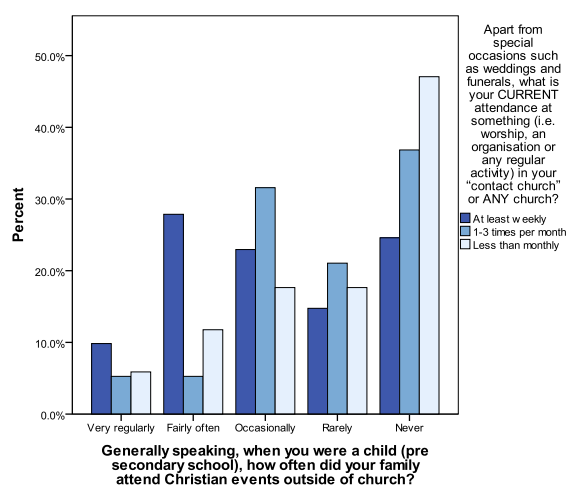


Figure 7.38 attendance at events by attendance now (n=97)

The levels of reported family practice:

Prayers at bedtime:

Very regularly (u11) 18.6% / (11-18) 5.2%

Fairly often (u11) 18.6% / (11-18) 11.5%

Family discuss faith:

Very regularly (u11) 3.1% / (11-18) 5.2%

Fairly often (u11) 12.4% / (11-18) 9.4%

Attend Christian events:

Very regularly (u11) 8.2% / (11-18) 9.4%

Fairly often (u11) 20.6% / (11-18) 18.8%

Figure 7.39 family faith practices at age u11 and 11-18 (n=97)

Although the figures are generally too small to find correlations with current faith and church attendance, one interesting outstanding pattern emerged, namely that those who went to Christian events outside church as a family very regularly or fairly often when they were a child (pre-secondary school) were more common amongst those now attending church weekly than those who attend less often.

Although it was not specifically mentioned as an option, some respondents highlighted the importance of family when giving their reasons for their continued church involvement:

- *Family continuing to go to that Church*
- *only as it is my family's church and it is local*
- *I still attend Sunday morning services because my family attend and I do genuinely like going.*

The question on the questionnaire which asked about various family practices during their teenage years gave an opportunity to comment on their answers and several respondents referred to a lack or absence of such practices due to lack of faith on the part of parents:

- *Neither of my parents are religious or have a faith per se. They would say they believe in God and sometimes talk to him in times of need but do not trust in him as Lord.*
- *Due to Father not being a Christian or having any belief it was harder to achieve most of these acts*
- *Mum only became a Christian a few years ago.*
- *My parents sent us to church as children but only attended at Christmas, Easter etc.*
- *As we grew up we talk more about faith issues, mainly my siblings and I to our father. We were read Bible stories at bedtime until about 11 years old and family attendance to church has declined over the years with my brother and father attending less often but my mother, sister and I attend regularly.*
- *We were a non Christian, non church going family until later on in life*
- *Personal devotion and attendance at Christian events by myself but never with family*
- *Not done as a family but would go to church with my mum and we would talk about our faith together.*

Others explained their family faith practices in relation to various other factors, but there was very little sense that such behaviour was a common experience for the vast majority of respondents:

- *My dad is and has been a minister for the majority of my life.*
- *Praying at meal times consists of saying grace on Sunday*
- *hard as I have a big family and not everyone is in at the same times*
- *My 11 year old sister has become a Christian, and so me and her would read the Bible and pray together daily when I was at home*

- *Discussions about faith in my family were normally my parents or brother asking my sister or I questions about our faiths*
- *Prayer and devotional times moved from 'family activities' to personal decisions.*
- *My brother and I both became Christians in our teenage years, so discussions about faith began to happen more frequently in our home*
- *my parents let me find my own faith as a teenager*

The interviewees gave varied accounts of the influence of family upbringing. Andy clearly felt it was important, saying that *'I think you have to have a solid... I think your family gives you a solid faith foundation anyway especially whenever you go to university'*.

Despite her current lack of faith, Becca said she believed elements of what her mum taught her remain with her and may be seen in her values and attitudes. David spoke of how his parents were careful not to force or pressure him into faith, but the influence was much more subtle. However, he related this to the fact that his parents' faith was not explicit or obvious to others, which suggests that a laissez faire approach had not been helpful in his case.

Emma described how her parents battled with her younger brother, who no longer has any church involvement, to get him to attend church; *'...they pushed to a certain extent to the point where, it doesn't matter how much we pushed, he's not going to go and if he did go he sat there, he didn't get up to sing and he just... ..it got to the point where 'we're not gonna push him anymore because he's gonna resent, he's gonna hate us!''*.

Emma mentioned how her parents would read her from the Bible when she was a child, but that it was of critical importance to her current faith that her church was their family's church where they went together. *'Going to church on a Sunday morning together... If somebody said to me 'Church – what's the first thing that comes into your head about church?' – Sunday morning, into the car, going to church as a family and sitting down in the pew, and somebody turning round and going "there's the Gibson family". '*

Helen would clearly have appreciated more explicit faith practice in her family home; *'I've never heard mummy or daddy pray and it is a thorn in my side because I feel I have missed out on that there but then mummy and daddy have sent me to so much other stuff that I have gained from it too, so I can't really say...like I know I have got away, like I'm going out with a boy now who is a Christian and his home is completely broken, he is the only person in his family that's a Christian and I know I've so much to be thankful for compared to him but just you get frustrated too'*. Helen, however, admitted that the pattern may not be easily predictable as her male cousin was the only Christian in his family; however his wife came from a home where faith was practiced openly encouraging her faith, but she had a 'rebel

brother' who is a 'complete atheist'. At the same time, Helen wondered if her own brother might be different if there had been explicit faith in her family growing up and this led to some interesting thoughts about her own future role as a parent:

I don't want my children to go to Sunday school because I think that is my job to teach them. Like I don't think they have to go to Sunday school, Sunday school is for the children that don't have it, that don't have that at home; ... I want to teach them to pray, want to teach them to read, colour in with them, I know they need the fellowship of other children but sure they can go and play with other children, like Sunday school is another school, they go in and sit round a table'.

Wider family

Less than 10% of respondents said that anyone in their wider family spoke to them about faith when they were aged 11-18 in a way in which they could direct the conversation, ask questions and express doubt (figure 7.40). However, when asked whether various family members had significantly influenced their faith and spiritual development, the most commonly chosen by some way was grandmother (34), although others mentioned included sister (20), grandfather (18) aunt (15) and uncle (13). Of particular interest is the fact that 43% of SACs said that their grandmother had influenced them, compared to 34% of LAC or VIP, suggesting that not only is this relationship important but it may be particularly effective in terms of later spiritual maturity (figure 7.41).

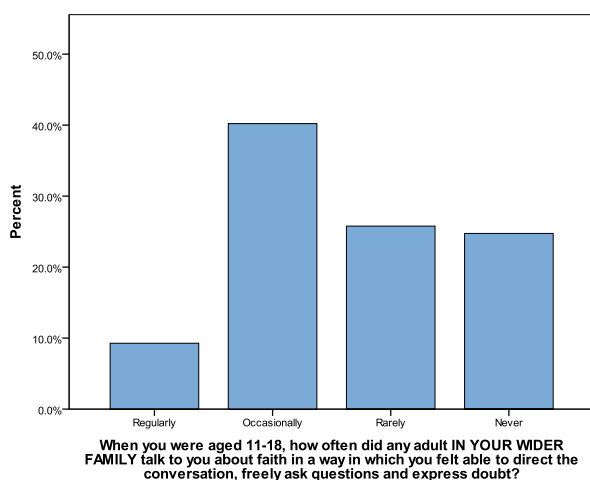


Figure 7.40 faith conversations with wider family (11-18) (n=97)

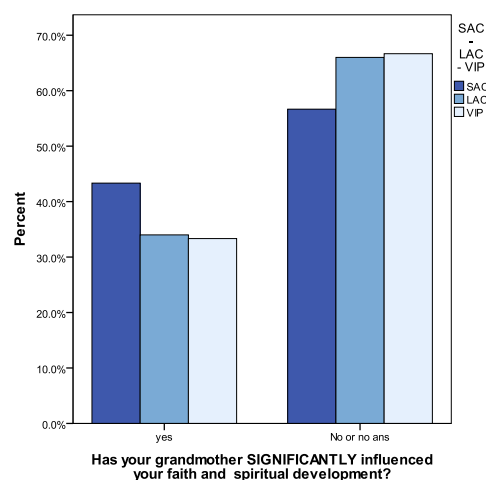


Figure 7.41 influence of grandmother by faith now (n=98)

One respondent in an open answer referred to family devotional practices in the wider family; *'Prayers and devotions happen with my grandmother but neither parent. I was sent to stuff like GB and Sunday school but my parents did and do not attend church'.*

The interviewees also made reference to the role of wider family, and grandmother's in particular. The influence of grandparents may often be strong, but is not always straightforward. Amy made reference to her grandfather's positive influence, in particular

'talking to my grandfather just because he is so knowledgeable'. However, she alluded to her belief that his influence may not always have been positive:

*It was more from my granda, not so much from my parents, my mum would have read bible stories and yes took me to church and everything and got me to read back my verses but I think it was my granda initially who did all that kind of thing. **What was it he did that was so important?** 'Meetin'!' Always going to 'the meetin' down the road'! Gospel meetings. And always doing like, you know, have me memorise my verses and had to say the same prayer every night: ask the Lord Jesus into my heart, and forgive my sins. Just that, and talking about the bible to him all the time, always praying before meals, (we never do that in the house) my granda every, always praying, I always see him praying on his knees when I was younger too, so that really influenced, I spent a lot of time with them when I was younger because they looked after me when mum and dad were working. **So you were consciously observing his faith, or was it not so conscious?** You know what is was, I think he had infeed fear into me - instilled fear into me and I think - this sounds bad - I became a Christian for the wrong reasons because I was afraid of going to hell.*

Becca also referred to methods of coercion from grandparents; *'It definitely would have been my granny and granda who would have been the most influential. **What form did that influence take?** Blackmailing me to go to church. My granny actually bought me my youth Bible whenever I was 15 as a Christmas present completely of her own bat. She had heard me talking about it. She would have taken me down to church and encouraged me. It was actually my granny who passed on this letter to do with your study. Even now after all these years it's like 'I've got post for you from the church'.'*

David was in no doubt about the importance of his grandmother on his faith, but again expressed the contrast to home; *'I know I do remember vividly my grandmother, my father's mum – she was very, very devout to her faith as was my uncle and my grandfather... I always feel when I went to my granny's with my father it would be a case of you would feel the faith more in the house than you would in ours. You would definitely notice it more fully... '*

Despite her parents coming to faith when she was a child and the value she placed on her parents encouragement to her to attend sending her to numerous organisations, Helen was also very clear that her grandparents had been a more explicit influence on her faith.

'I never remember mummy or daddy reading to us or praying with us but I do remember granny and granda doing it. Like I remember staying at granda's house and every night after the news, half ten, granda and granny both got down on their knees, granny read like the daily reading notes and then the Bible and then the both of them prayed and they made you like every time you stayed they were like 'you sit down, you get down on your knees and you pray'... So I don't understand how it sorta skipped mummy and daddy but they just don't talk about stuff like that, just don't...maybe I don't know.'

Laura's parents do not share her faith but she also spoke of the significant influence of her grandparents:

'probably the only experience of family and faith was whenever I would go to their house and as my granny was putting us to bed like 7, 8 year olds, she would have every night said the Lord's prayer with us just before we were going to bed, that was probably the only real influence that she had, bringing us to church and coming to displays. '

Andy made particular reference to how his older sister's faith has inspired him, particularly in relation to his struggles about not wanting to study away from home; *'she just goes, she hears the call and she... I said to her I can really see you being in Africa on a mission team, being a missionary or something like that, and she was like yea, I would love to do that and she is just so willing to go and I wish I was that willing... she is just so strong about everything - as far as I remember I think she, I talk to her openly about anything...'*

Faith community

83.5% of respondents stated that they are still involved in their contact church and 83.9% said they 'feel they belong' there. In relation to that, 88.9% of females and 73.5% of males said they 'feel they belong' which does ask questions about young men's integration with church. There was also some regional differences, with 95% of West respondents and 100% of South respondents said they 'feel they belong', but only 73.7% and 75.7% saying the same in the North and East regions respectively. It would be interesting to know if this is due to differences in the depth of community engagement in these regions or for other reasons. Differences according to size and location were not large. Although LACs were just as likely as SACs to say they belong to their contact church (89.8% and 90.0% respectively), and unsurprisingly only 41.8% of VIPs said they felt they belong, though the direction of this and effect cannot be established

Although this level of engagement appears fairly high at this surface level, other evidence suggests that a feeling of belonging is not consistent and has a number of variables behind the headline figure and this will be explored more in this and subsequent sections.

Influence of individuals in church

Respondents were asked how helpful or unhelpful a selection of individuals and groups of people were in their faith and spiritual development and these are summarized in table 7.8 and figure 7.40 Respondents were most likely to describe were friends/peers as 'very helpful', (42.9%), highlighting the key importance of the peer group in the church setting. The next

most likely to be ‘very helpful’ were paid youth worker (39.1%), and although only 46 respondents (i.e. 50% of those who answered this question) had a youth worker, this is still a high proportion. The third most chosen ‘very helpful’ category was volunteer youth leaders (37.8%), underlining the importance of those who run their organisations.

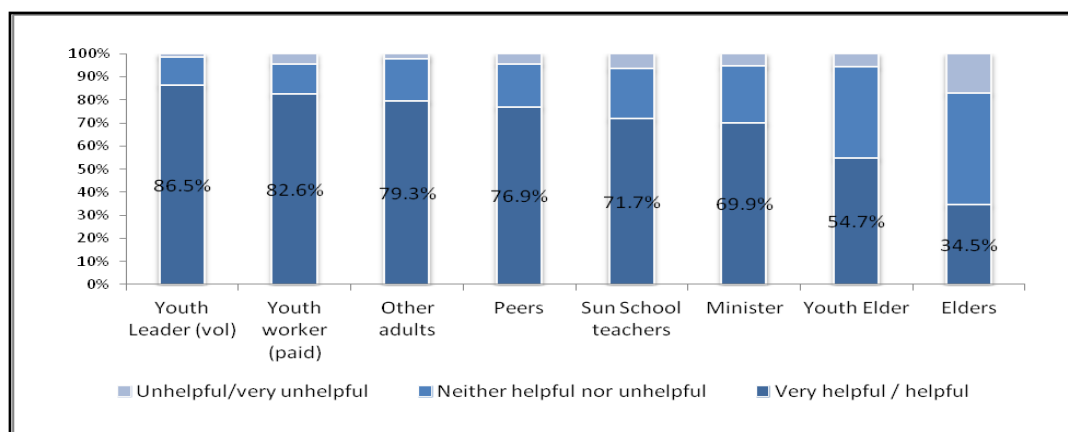


Figure 7.42 helpfulness of various people in church context (n= 74 / 46 / 87 / 91 / 92 / 93 / 53 / 87)

	As a young person growing up in the church, how helpful or unhelpful were the following people in your faith and spiritual development?											
	Very helpful		Helpful		Very helpful or Helpful		Neither helpful nor unhelpful		Unhelpful or Very unhelpful		Total	
	Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %
Peers / friends	39	42.9	31	34.1	70	76.9	17	18.7	4	4.4	91	100.0
Youth worker (paid)	18	39.1	20	43.5	38	82.6	6	13.0	2	4.4	46	100.0
Youth leader (vol)	28	37.8	36	48.6	64	86.5	9	12.2	1	1.4	74	100.0
Other adults	20	23.0	49	56.3	69	79.3	16	18.4	2	2.2	87	100.0
Your minister	25	26.9	40	43.0	65	69.9	23	24.7	5	5.4	93	100.0
Specific youth elder	14	26.4	15	28.3	29	54.7	21	39.6	3	5.7	53	100.0
Sun Sch teacher(s)	10	10.9	56	60.9	66	71.7	20	21.7	6	6.6	92	100.0
Your elders	5	5.7	25	28.7	30	34.5	42	48.3	15	17.2	87	100.0

Table 7.8 helpfulness of various people in church context

As table 7.8 shows, when ‘very helpful’ & ‘helpful’ were combined, the clear highest influence were volunteer leaders (86.5%) and youth workers (82.6%), then other adults (79.3%) and friends / peers (76.9%). Although Sunday school teachers Ministers and parents each were found helpful overall, elders were notably less appreciated than other groups. Only 5.7% said their elders were ‘very helpful’, 34.5% ‘very helpful or helpful’ combined, but 10.3% said they were ‘unhelpful’ and 6.9% ‘very unhelpful’. When asked about the influence of such individuals, Andy awkwardly explained that they were ineffective; **‘Minister, elders anyone like that. Ahh.....mmm.....no....honestly, not really.’**

Considering the potential influence of these groups and individuals, 56.7% of SACs said their friends were ‘very helpful’ in their faith compared to 37.5% of LACs and 27.3% of VIPs (figure 7.43, table 7.9). However, the difference was not apparent for those who found friends merely ‘helpful’ so it seems that only when friends were especially helpful can this be linked to long-term spiritual strength. The pattern was similar when it comes to current church attendance, as 50% of those who attend church weekly found friends ‘very helpful’ in their faith growing up, compared less than 30% of those who attended less frequently (figure 7.44).

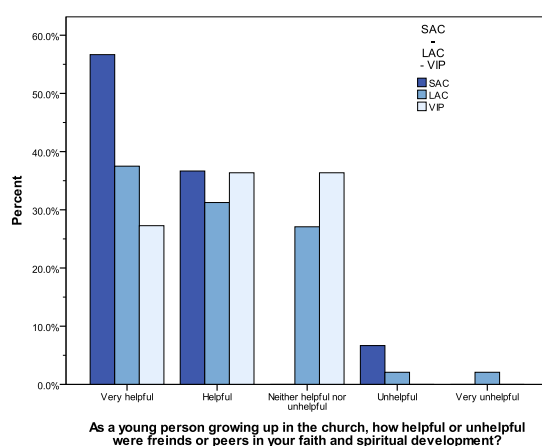


Figure 7.43 helpfulness of peers by faith now (n=90)

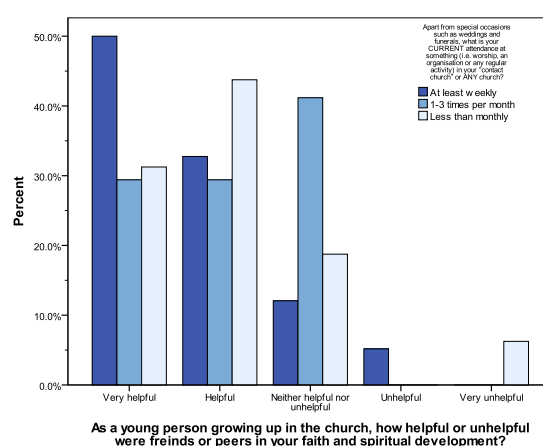


Figure 7.44 helpfulness of peers by church attendance now (n=91)

As a yp growing up in the church, how helpful or unhelpful were friends or peers in your faith & spiritual development?	SAC - LAC - VIP							
	SAC		LAC		VIP		Total	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Very helpful	17	56.7%	18	37.5%	3	27.3%	38	42.7%
Helpful	11	36.7%	15	31.3%	4	36.4%	30	33.7%
Not helpful or unhelpful			13	27.1%	4	36.4%	17	19.1%
Unhelpful	2	6.7%	1	2.1%			3	3.4%
Very unhelpful			1	2.1%			1	1.1%
Total	30	100.0%	48	100.0%	11	100.0%	89	100.0%

Table 7.9 helpfulness of friends by faith now

The pattern is even clearer for the influence of volunteer youth leaders as 63.6% of SACs found leaders ‘very helpful’ (compared to 30.0% of LACs and 20.0% of VIPs), again the important element being that the leaders were ‘very helpful’ rather than just ‘helpful’ (figure 7.45, table 7.10). Leaders appear to be greatly appreciated, with even 80% of VIPs saying that they were very helpful or helpful. It may be concluded that those leaders who go beyond their regular commitment to the role may be in the best position to maximise their influence on the future faith of the young people they lead. A similar, if less marked, pattern was found in relation to church attendance, 46% of those who attend church weekly now found youth leaders ‘very helpful’ to their faith, only 30% of those attending 1-3 times per month (figure 7.46).

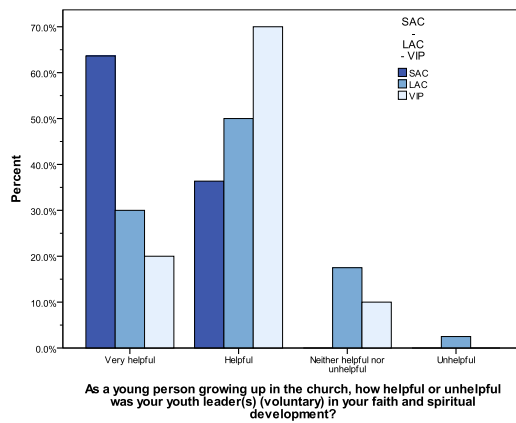


Figure 7.45 helpfulness of leaders by faith now (n=72)

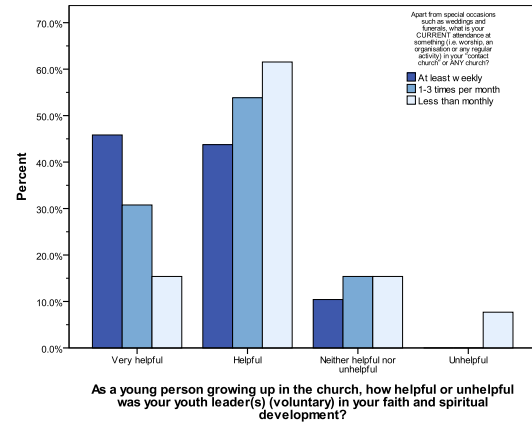


Figure 7.46 helpfulness of leaders by church attendance now (n=74)

As a yp growing up in church how helpful or unhelpful was your youth leader (voluntary) in faith & spiritual development?	SAC - LAC - VIP							
	SAC		LAC		VIP		Total	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Very helpful	14	63.6%	12	30.0%	2	20.0%	28	38.9%
Helpful	8	36.4%	20	50.0%	7	70.0%	35	48.6%
Neither helpful nor unhelpful			7	17.5%	1	10.0%	8	11.1%
Unhelpful			1	2.5%			1	1.4%
Total	22	100.0%	40	100.0%	10	100.0%	72	100.0%

Table 7.10 helpfulness of leaders by faith now

There is a very strong relationship between the perceived helpfulness of paid youth workers, as 66.7% of SACs who had one saying their youth worker was 'very helpful', compared to only 23.8% of LACs (figure 7.47, table 7.11). There is a similar but less clear pattern regarding church attendance, suggesting that paid youth workers who make a significant connection with a young person may find fruit in later faith, if less so in terms of church attendance (figure 7.48). Again, even 90% VIPs who had a youth worker valued their influence.

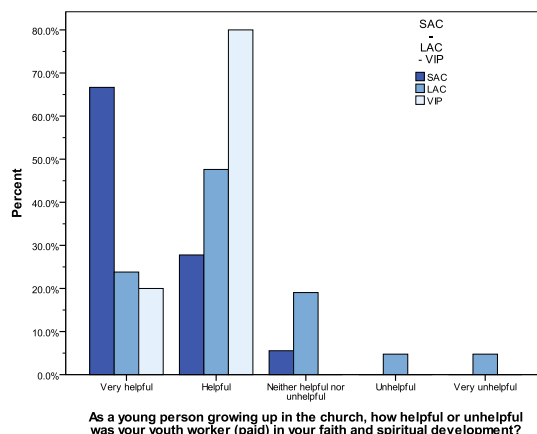


Figure 7.47 helpfulness of youth worker by faith now (n=46)

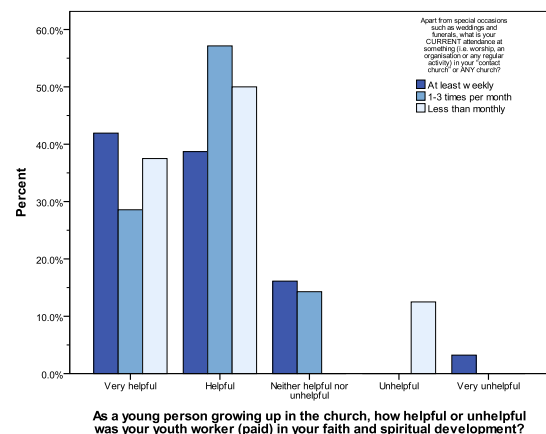


Figure 7.48 helpfulness of youth worker by church attendance now (n=46)

As a young person growing up in the church, how helpful or unhelpful was your youth worker (paid) in your faith and spiritual	SAC - LAC - VIP							
	SAC		LAC		VIP		Total	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Very helpful	12	66.7%	5	23.8%	1	20.0%	18	40.9%
Helpful	5	27.8%	10	47.6%	4	80.0%	19	43.2%
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	1	5.6%	4	19.0%			5	11.4%
Unhelpful			1	4.8%			1	2.3%
Very unhelpful			1	4.8%			1	2.3%
Total	18	100.0%	21	100.0%	5	100.0%	44	100.0%

Table 7.11 helpfulness of youth workers by faith now

Perhaps the most striking reported influence is that of other adults, of whom 44.8% of SACs found ‘very helpful’, in contrast to 10.6% of LACs and 11.1% VIPs (figure 7.49, table 7.12). Any impact on church attendance is less clear, in fact those attending church less than monthly were the most likely to say that other adults were ‘very helpful’ in their faith (figure 7.50).

As a young person growing up in the church, how helpful or unhelpful were other adult Christians in your faith and spiritual	SAC - LAC - VIP							
	SAC		LAC		VIP		Total	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Very helpful	13	44.8%	5	10.6%	1	11.1%	19	22.4%
Helpful	13	44.8%	32	68.1%	4	44.4%	49	57.6%
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	3	10.3%	8	17.0%	4	44.4%	15	17.6%
Unhelpful			1	2.1%			1	1.2%
Very unhelpful			1	2.1%			1	1.2%
Total	29	100.0%	47	100.0%	9	100.0%	85	100.0%

Table 7.12 helpfulness of other adults by faith now

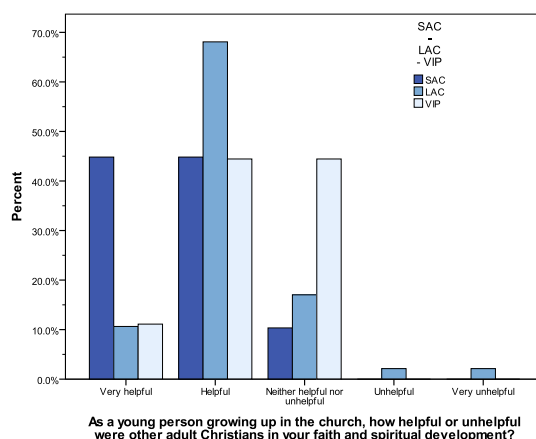


Figure 7.49 helpfulness adult Christians by faith now (n=85)

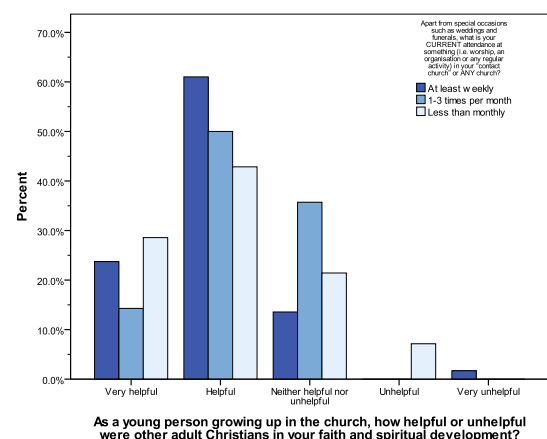


Figure 7.50 helpfulness adults by church attendance now (n=87)

Each of the interviewees spoke about the importance of various individuals in their churches who had shaped their own spiritual development. Amy spoke of the importance of a Bible class leader who was passionate about his faith and cared for those in his class, explaining that

'you just knew that he cared, so he was probably my biggest influence.' She also mentioned the influence of an older lady Sunday School teacher; *'she was about 70, she was just like your granny but every granny's dream, she never nagged at you...she was always so joyous and asking how I am and even now to this day she is in her 80's she is still asking me how I am,'*

Andy singled out his B.B. captain who *'was just a real role model and seemed so passionate about what he was doing, I don't know I just really admired him I think'.* Similarly the role of uniformed leaders was named by Laura as vital for her faith development; *'my G.B. leaders were always just a couple of years older than me and I have always just kind of though, gosh they are so cool, I would love to be like them when I'm older, and I think that is probably part of the reason I became a Christian and then whenever I became a Christian and continued going back to G.B. they were the ones that were doing Bible studies and I was able to, they were role models more, I think they have been influential that way'.*

Volunteer leaders also mattered to Nicky when in church; *'there were certain kind of youth leaders that you developed a kinda relationship with that you kinda thought 'this is someone I could trust if I had questions I can go to and look to' and they don't judge you they just accept what you're saying and help you move forward... just their honesty and acceptance'.* David highlighted the value of a paid youth worker, describing the former worker in his church. *'Whenever he was around that was a massive influence. He was the sort of person that would take time out, come round to your house and say hello sit down have a cuppa, have a chat. And I don't think that happens quite as often nowadays. You don't get people who decide to come round for a chat if nothing else and you can discuss, you know, 'how are you doing?'* Helen too much appreciated the active role of her youth worker in developing her faith;

'she spend all week building relationships with us all week and then Friday night and Sunday night Sarah took (a youth programmes) so Sarah was definitely a big person...she was just so caring, you just know that she cares, like everyone knows that she prays for us all the time... We were accountable to her for a start and we just knew she cared and I think that role her especially'.

Laura also spoke of how she had become able to trust youth worker in her church with significant issues in her life and faith. *'It is always difficult in a church to go up to someone and say 'actually, I'm having doubts', we have had a youth worker for the last three years and I think she has been very honest with us therefore we can be honest with her, I think it's just a very honest church, our minister as well, he would always asking questions about how we are and I think I have always, maybe not when I was younger but recently over the past couple of years I have felt very close to the 2 of them and I would say that's the thing.*

Amy particularly valued her friends in supporting her as she tried to resist social temptations such as alcohol; *‘if you are having a struggle, some of my people I am friendly with who aren’t Christian don’t really understand why I have faith or why I am struggling in my faith, because they don’t believe in God think you are talking this biggest pile of rubbish, so it is always good to have a Christian friend that you can bat ideas around with or they can help you out, or give you a verse. So I think that is the most important thing’*. Laura also felt the role of her friends ranked as the highest influence; *‘I suppose having fellowship with them has been the thing that has probably kept me the strongest, recently’*.

Methods of engagement

38.1% of respondents said there were adults in the church who talked to them about faith ‘very regularly’ or ‘fairly often’ when they were aged 11-18, meaning almost two thirds of respondents had this experience only occasionally or less frequently (figure 7.51). It is striking that 43.3% of SACs said other adults spoke to them ‘very regularly’, in sharp contrast to only 8.0% of LACs (figure 7.52, table 7.13).

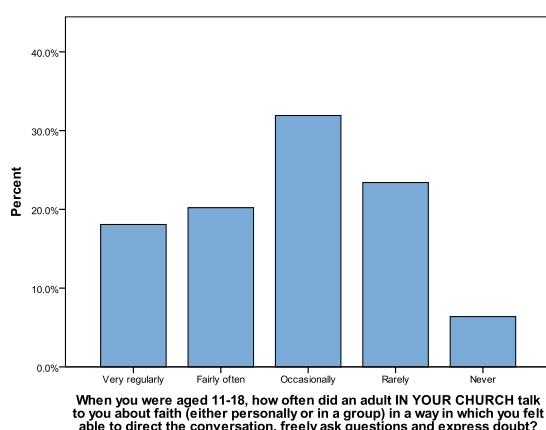


Figure 7.51 *f* adults talking about faith (11-18) (n=94)

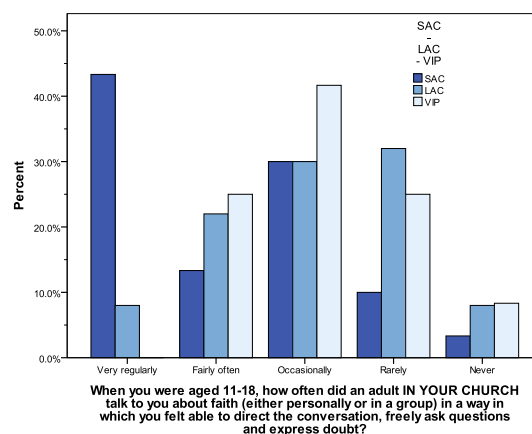


Figure 7.52 *f* adults talking about faith (11-18) by faith now (n=92)

When you were aged 11-18, how often did an adult IN YOUR CHURCH talk to you about faith (either personally or in a group) in a way in which you felt able to direct the conversation, freely ask questions and express doubt?	SAC - LAC – VIP							
	SAC		LAC		VIP		Total	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Very regularly	13	43.3%	4	8.0%	0	.0%	17	18.5%
Fairly often	4	13.3%	11	22.0%	3	25.0%	18	19.6%
Occasionally	9	30.0%	15	30.0%	5	41.7%	29	31.5%
Rarely	3	10.0%	16	32.0%	3	25.0%	22	23.9%
Never	1	3.3%	4	8.0%	1	8.3%	6	6.5%
Total	30	100.0%	50	100.0%	12	100.0%	92	100.0%

Table 7.13 frequency of adults in church talking about faith (11-18) by faith now

There may have been only a small association between current church attendance and those who said other adults spoke to them about faith (figure 7.53). However there does seem to be a strong relationship between those who feel they belong to their contact church and whether they had adults who spoke to them ‘very regularly’ about faith (22% compared to none of those who do not feel they belong); in contrast, nearly double those who said they do not feel they belong said they only occasionally had someone speak to them compared to those who do feel they belong (figure 7.54).

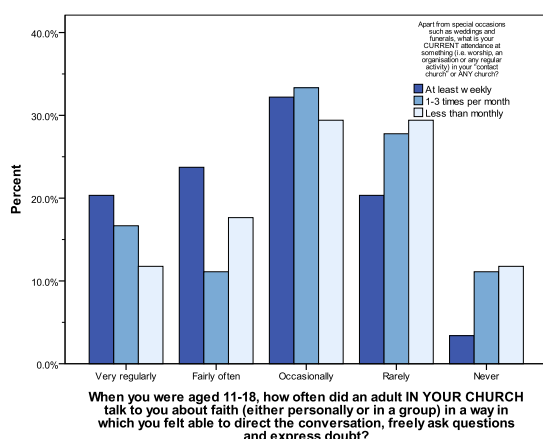


Figure 7.53 *f* adults talking about faith (11-18) by attendance (n=94)

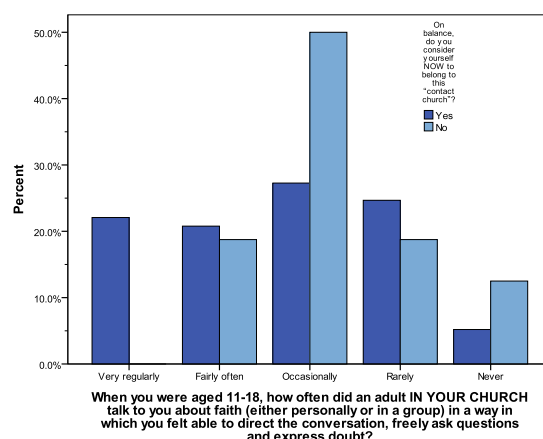


Figure 7.54 *f* adults talking about faith (11-18) by feeling of belonging to church (n=93)

23% of respondents said young people and adults of different ages were able to come together to get to know one another ‘very regularly’ and 31% said this happened ‘fairly often’ (figure 7.55). Nearly three times the number of SACs said the above happened ‘very regularly’ compared to LACs (figure 7.56) and there also seems to be an association with current church attendance, although there is a complex pattern (figure 7.57). Twice those who said they feel they belong had this experience ‘very regularly’ compared to those who did not (figure 7.58).

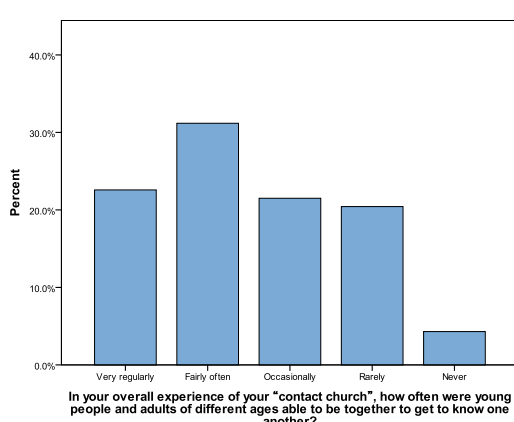


Figure 7.55 opportunity for young people and adults to get together (n=93)

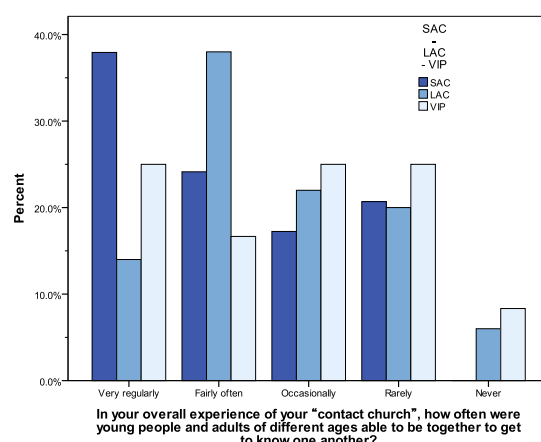


Figure 7.56 opportunity for young people & adults to get together by faith now (n=91)

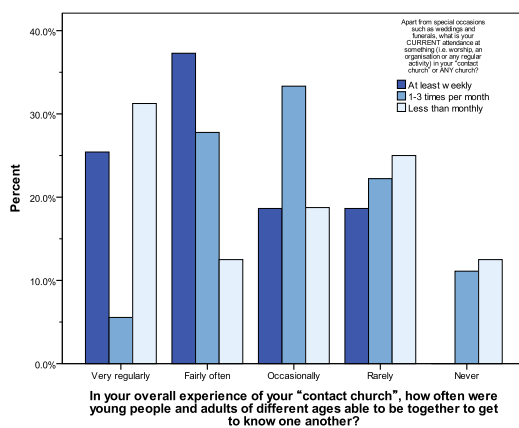


Figure 7.57 opportunity for young people and adults to get together by attendance now (n=93)

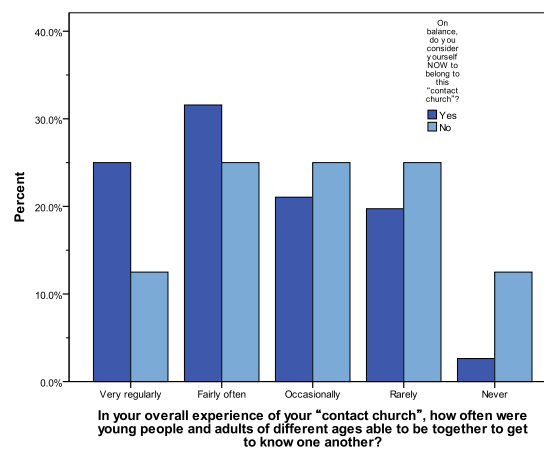


Figure 7.58 opportunity for young people and adults to get together by feeling of belonging (n=92)

Andy illustrated how spiritual conversations can be infrequent; *'I don't know if I whenever I was growing up if I really even talked to anyone that much about my faith'*.

The strength of the care received and community experienced was mentioned frequently by respondents as a key factor in encouraging enduring involvement in church. When asked an open question about what they felt was important in keeping young people connected to the church, several of the respondents simply wrote 'friends' and some of the other answers included the following references to the importance of a strong community:

- *a community of believers who have genuine love and concern for one another,*
- *Influencing and caring for other Christians.*
- *friends and family and a heart for the community in which the church is actively involved in.*
- *Better pastoral care from the elders*
- *The factors important in keeping me involved in church generally are having a welcoming church and congregation as well as a comfortable environment to learn more about God and question things freely.*
- *Having relationships with people in the church of all ages has kept me involved in church life. First is like a family and people notice when you are not at church which makes you feel valued. Attending young adults group has kept me involved with those that are my age*
- *Having the continued support of older members of the church in my spiritual life so I have confidence to continue serving in using my gifts.*
- *Honestly, probably that it's where the vast majority of my friends are, and that it offers great opportunities to grow closer to people both that I do and don't know.*

These further comments give some interesting perspective about the potential value of intergenerational community:

- *It is different every week, which makes it more exciting to younger people, we also have a great choir, different people come to tell their story of life, there is also a youth church once a month, with so, so many young people taking about their experience with God, and with that there are big bands which sing God's songs, and are great I really enjoy this, we all*

sing so loud I'm nearly dancing it's that good. This is also followed by a big supper in the church hall after, it is so much fun, and we all talk after, and enjoy each other's company.

- *Think people can get pulled away, but also not having a good support network of similar aged youth can be a reason for leaving Church, feeling left out etc*
- *Encourage congregations to GET INVOLVED! Pair up older members and younger members for mentoring schemes - adopt a teen etc. Organise bonding weekends and outreach missions specifically for young people and their friends.*

Clearly there are a variety of ways in which relationships within a church community can be influential and this both backs up the data about the influence of certain individuals, and was echoed by interviewees in their reflections on what was important in enduring connections. David spoke of learning to discover the value of trusting others in his church as a support network. *'I didn't do it until last year, there was quite a few revelations I had last year but I found that talking to other people and friends I know who work through churches and so on would be more open and listen. They could relate to me better than somebody in the church because they knew me. They could sort of understand where I was coming from. .'*

The impact of a simple event such as a church lunch was highlighted by Andy as a helpful experience. *'I just think it just brings the church together and I think it's really important that we all get to know each other as well, to create a sense of fellowship rather than just turning up and being by yourself as well like you want everybody to be free and be able to talk about whatever, you know'.*

This has clearly helped Andy to greatly value the community provided by his home church, even when he is studying away from home; *I know I want to feel part of the church at home, like being away I don't want to not... come home and not be a part of it anymore. Probably being in contact and showing that you are an important part of the church, maybe some of the elders contacting you and definitely knowing that people are praying for you'.* However, Helen noted that simply holding such events was not enough as they must be accompanied by intentional mixing between groups and generations; *'Have social events, the old people stay in their groups and the young people stay in their own groups so I don't know; the only person that can change it is God, he has to change everyone's hearts to make them talk to other people'.*

Helen, despite her frustrations about her church, was very appreciative of the support of some older members of the congregation after a service where she and others were speaking to the congregation about their experiences in summer missions. *'I appreciate it, people taking the time to say well done it means so much to you and you know that those men the ones who says*

well done to you are the men who have been praying the whole time you are away and it makes all the difference knowing that'.

There were less favourable experiences mentioned also and Helen expressed how frustrated she was that people in her church had designated seats and was, in her opinion, very unwelcoming, especially when she compared it to her positive experience of an independent church.

A lot of appreciation was expressed for the role of organisations, notably youth fellowships, and several about the specific value of small groups. Of those who answered the question 'which of the programmes and organisations above (in q 40 – 43) were most helpful to your Christian faith?' The following were most frequent: Youth fellowship (30); Bible Class (14); GB (12); Youth club (6); BB (5). An open-ended question concerning the role of the church in respondents' spiritual development and again provided some very useful additional insight to enhance this data, including the following statements:

- *Small groups and bible studies, I got to know the bible for myself, and exodus because I saw that Christians could be 'cool' young people too not just old traditionalists.*
- *The small group bible study that we had during the week with the youth worker and friends, and then just friends when youth worker finished (the completed a gap year with a Christian service organisation)*
- *Youth fellowship was also really influential in my life and made my faith stronger.*
- *A youth house group was set up for 14-18 year olds and the environment to openly and honestly discuss all Christian issues was fantastic and the encouragement from the voluntary youth leaders continues and is/was fantastic.*
- *Youth fellowship and older Christian friends were the most important, Sunday school teachers from about 2nd year up were particularly helpful and taught us applications with the Bible and not just stories. Random conversations with older youth and young adults were most significant.*

Although David had some difficulty with one particular leader in the BB where he attended and with some of what he saw as their antiquated methods, he still valued this provision. *'For the time I was there I was, and with the strange, strict rules that did apply, I have to say I enjoyed it. If nothing else, the BB did teach me certain disciplines and helped me along... they said well everybody is different but you yourself can be your own person but they basically influenced me to calm down and sorta take things a bit easier and listen. Basically, pointed me in a good direction to be in'.*

Those respondents who are no longer involved in church were asked what would persuade them to return and two specifically and clearly called for real acceptance and practical reaching out to them:

- *Contact from the church, someone getting in touch!*
- *Knowing that if I went I would feel welcome and part of the church instead of feeling like I am not good enough or people are judging me or looking at me in a certain way. Going to church should be about God and faith not feeling these sorts of things*

The theme of follow-up was apparent in the interviews, not least in the moving story of Becca whose experience of feeling unappreciated began before she left church when she was in her mid-teens to attend an independent church. *'I felt as I grew up they dealt with me not as a person, more like a member of that family so – you know what I mean?'* She said that the feeling of only being known as 'the children of...' rather than individuals, applied to her siblings also, whom she believed were poorly treated after her parents' marriage broke up. *'There was never any follow up in regards to my brother and sister in regards to how they were doing... My sister is just 19 now and she's now living on her own and you know someone to call in and have a chat and make sure they are ok – reassure them that the church is still there for them. Because my sister is living in the village now and so she could obviously come.'* She showed no signs of bitterness, but was clearly upset that she believed her church had unfairly treated her mother in preference to her father and his parents but that she and her siblings had never been seen as individuals nor given any follow-up and she urged churches to ensure young people were treated individually; *'nobody's made any contact with me and as far as I know nobody has made any contact with my brother or sister, you know, to see how we're doing on that respect and then they turned my mother away... Treat us as an individual.... I would never have been seen as myself, so actually realising that children grow up and while they may be children without many words at a young age whenever they grow older they do grow minds and to treat them like that. That would be the only thing I can think of'.*

David explained that the process of contact with young people need not be complicated; *'if someone would just turn round and just tell me, there's a set night here you're welcome to come or not I can sit in the corner and listen and hear them talking about this event – I'm sort of they left me out...'* However, his experience of a pastoral visit when in hospital proved to be instrumental in his return to involvement with his church which prompted a follow-up contact from the church. *'I got an email one night just basically asking 'I haven't seen you in a long time, would you like to attend a get-together we're having at our house and well, it sort of worked from there again. It took me a couple of visits for the people that I recognised but they weren't 100% of me because I haven't seen you in that long and I didn't have a beard I didn't have the long hair and just it's been quite some time and they sorta looked at me from a distance for a couple of visits but they eventually came round again and would talk to me now on the street and say hello'.*

Nicky too talked very candidly of how no one had tried to find out why she was no longer attending church; *...I didn't attend church and then maybe I had missed a couple of weeks and I thought, oh I thought somebody would have said "oh, where have you gone you know it is not like you not to be here" sort of thing and...when that never came I just never decided to go back.'* Nicky explained further her experience as it related to her life circumstance, but how she felt the principle applied to young people in every case. *'the church didn't...weren't interested in where I'd gone and I just kinda thought "well if that's the attitude then..." it would have been nice to know, "oh, you are still welcome here, even though you have made that decision, that still doesn't stop you coming here" but that wasn't offered or reached out by the church so....'* Nicky raised how she was living with a same-sex partner and how this would not have been seen as acceptable in her church so she was not prepared to pretend she was not her girlfriend and so left the church. There had been no response from the church to her leaving, however:

*'So it wasn't that there was any active announcement or anything like that, but I just felt that the church lets people walk away too easily and there is a lot, you know, of statistics generally about the church where numbers are diminishing and 'is there going to be a church?' ...I always said, you know, there's lots of people go away to uni and then they wouldn't come back to church and things like that and people think... but there is no contact or nothing kept up in between so the relationship's kinda broken and where somebody else was... you know, even a text or a call "are you sick or is there something major going on in your life that you are not at church?" all of a sudden would have solved it and probably even to this day, 5 years later or whatever, it still would be nice for somebody to actually get in touch and say.... **Nobody has at all?** No.*

Emma felt that several of her peers had left the church because they did not get a message that they were valued. *'They go to university or maybe travelling and they get dislocated from the church and they come back generally they step back: 'I might get evil looks for not coming in those years' and I think that's where a lot of ones I maybe get lost or go to another church, or get married or have children'.*

Amy was also keen to highlight how important she believed follow-up could be as she noticed her peers become less connected to church:

'Probably just a wee text every so often from my youth leader or wee Facebook message saying I hope you are getting on ok, we are praying for you, that kind of thing and whenever I come back to feel completely like I have never left. Because I have noticed some people come into church, maybe they have changed but the relationships aren't the same, so just to be the same as if nothing has changed. And also I find a lot of my friends if they've moved away they don't go to a church which I think is really hard, maybe our church should try and make contact with their, like a couple of churches in the area before the go and arrange a meeting or family to welcome them in so that it is not as hard to go to church by yourself. I think that would be good.'

In contrast, Andy had an extremely good experience of congregational support around his studying away from home, mentioning the ‘lovely’ experience he had when he came home after his first term away. His response to the interviewers comment ‘**Some people go away and come back and say everyone has moved on and they don’t feel included**’ showed how much he had valued this:

*‘Oh no. That would be horrible. **What do you think made if feel ‘like home’ for you? Like everyone was over round me and like ‘how are you, how are you getting on?’ ...and they all speak to you and it is like almost as if they make a special effort and it is just so nice you know that you get that feeling of familiarity and it was just lovely. Would anyone in your church be in touch when you are away? ...my minister keeps in touch, by email and all and my mum works in the bank...and like there is always people in from the church and they are like how is he getting on and all this. You feel like people think about you when you are away? Yea and I know people are praying for me because they tell me that, they are like I am praying for you, we know it is hard for you being away from home and all, so it is so nice to know that people are praying for you and that they know it isn’t easy.***

Sacraments and Doctrine

Communion

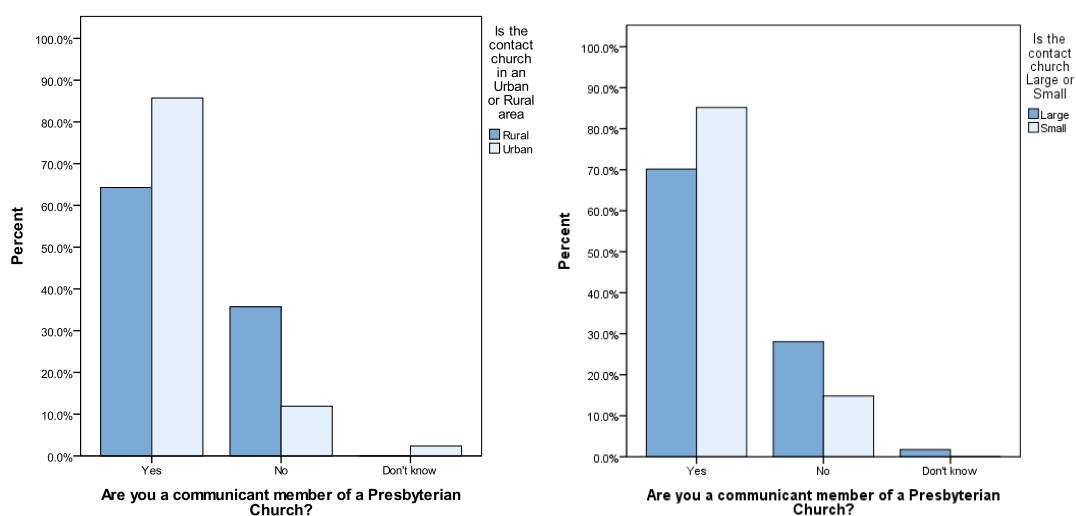


Figure 7.59 Communicant membership by location of cong.(n=84) Figure 7.60 Communicant membership by size of cong.(n=84)

75.0% of respondents who answered were communicant members of PCI, with males (80%) being a little more likely to be communicants than females (72%). Against expectation, there was little difference according to Region, apart from a slightly lower level of communicant membership those from South (68.8%). Also surprisingly, only 64.3% from Rural churches were communicants compared to 85.7% of those from Urban (figure 7.59). Those from smaller congregations were more likely to be communicants, 85.2% compared to 70.2% from larger congregations, (figure 7.60).

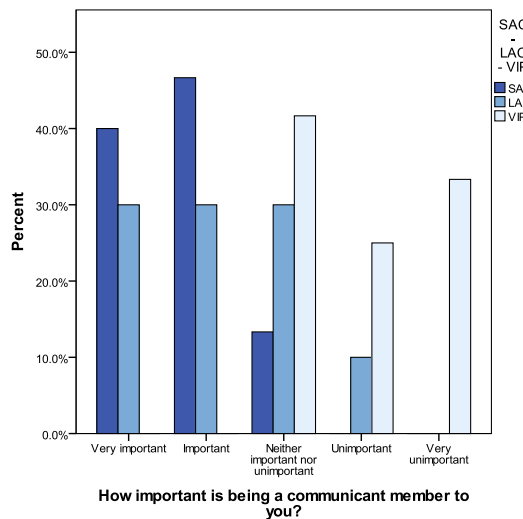


Figure 7.61 Importance of communicant membership
by Faith (n=93)

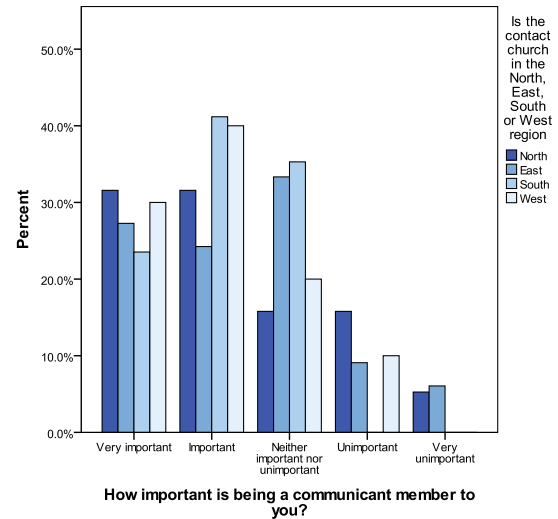


Figure 7.62 Importance of communicant membership
by region (n=90)

When asked about how important to be a communicant member 27.6% said it was Very Important and 30.6% Important (58.2% combined saying it was important to some level). This seems very significant given the nature of the sample, in that the vast majority are Christians involved in church and many are mature in their faith. SACs (40%) were more likely than LACs (30%) to say they found being a communicant member very important and that difference was wider in those who said it was important (46.7% compared to 30%); combining the ‘important’ and ‘very important’ categories meant a difference of 86.7% of SACs compared to 60% of LACs (figure 7.61). That may suggest that those who identified themselves as more spiritually active have a greater appreciation of the value of communicant membership, though the influence may be in the other direction, with spiritual maturity being a result of communicant membership.

From a geographical perspective there was a greater level of ambivalence in the East and South regions, as shown in figure 7.62, indicated by those who said communicant membership was ‘Neither Important nor Unimportant’ (33.3% and 35.5% respectively compared to 15.8% and 20.0% in North and West). More specifically, those from East appeared to value this sacramental allegiance least; only 51.5% stated that it was either Very Important or Important (compared to 70%, 64.7% & 63.2% in the West, South and North respectively).

Although those from both Small and Large congregation had identical combined proportions of ‘Very Important / Important’ (60.7%), those from Small congregations valued Communicant membership more, 39.3% saying it was Very Important compared to 23% from Large congregations (figure 7.63).

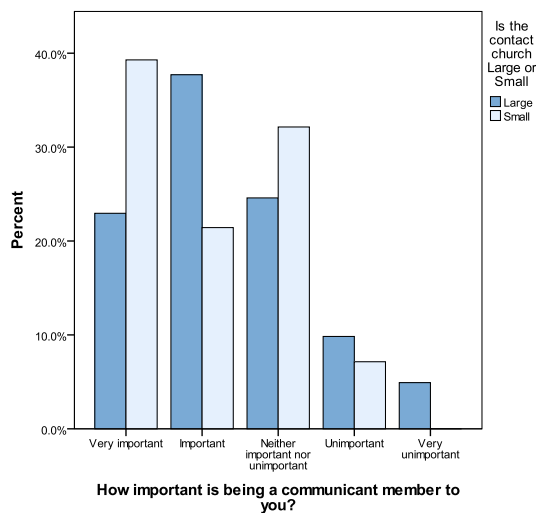


Figure 7.63 Importance of communicant membership by size of cong. (n=90).

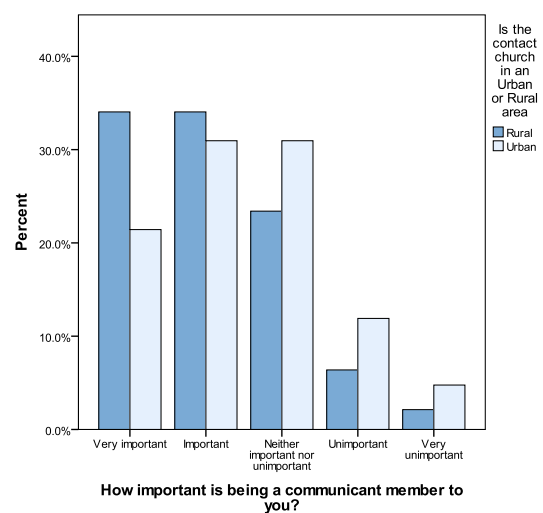


Figure 7.64 Importance of communicant membership by location of cong. (n=90).

In contrast to lower levels of Communicant membership, that membership may hold more importance to those from rural churches. 34% from Rural churches thought membership was very important compared to 21.4% from Urban churches (figure 7.64).

From these figures there appear to be indications of cultural patterns regarding communicant membership which show levels of membership may not correspond to importance such membership is held, but the pattern is complex and difficult to draw clear conclusions. However, helpful light was shed by interviewees who gave more detailed reflections on communicant membership and suggested that even those with a mature faith may value communion, but are somewhat ambivalent about their communicant membership.

Amy, for example, showed evidence of a strong, mature faith, but seemed very unsure about the need to be a Communicant member of her church. *'it is something I have thought about...I don't really know why I haven't - I just really didn't get round to it....No one's ever asked, well not in terms of elders or ministers or anything - maybe my friends would be like 'why aren't you doing this?' and I was 'I don't really know, I haven't got round to it yet'.* Neil too showed no strong valuing of his decision to become a Communicant member: *'I feel like it should have been significant but it possibility wasn't, it certainly wasn't a spiritual experience, I think that is worth saying.... One of the things is just reminding myself what it means to be a Christian I guess when I try to do communion I try to really remind myself that the fundamentals that I am saved, that I am not set apart, I'm not better than everyone else, that I am saved, and I need to remind myself of that often so maybe that's what I would say communion is to me. It is a reminder.'*

David's involvement in the church has been somewhat peripheral and he too seemed to have little interest in full membership: *'I never got to that stage... something I didn't perceive at the time. I never really concentrated too hard on it'*. Nicky was asked if she would like to be able to take communion, despite her distance from church and replied *'If there was a connection with the church and I felt part of it and felt that it was right then I would but...'*

Andy showed a clear understanding of the value of taking communion, but had some interesting views about the process of coming to the Lord's Table for the first time:

*It is very important like, because that is one of the two sacraments isn't it, the Lord's Supper? But I think I disagree with how my church brings people into the table, into the Lord's Supper... Well the way it is structured in my church is that you come to age. **What age is that?** I think it's 16 - yeah 16 and it is almost like it is the 'done thing' rather than you do it because you want to do it, it is just sort of along a pattern...I think it should be done whenever someone comes to faith themselves and they have to decide well 'I am ready to take this step' or not. I don't think age should determine it at all... **Why why does it matter to you?** Because it is remembering Jesus, the price Jesus paid for us and it is a time we really want to, sort of, bring everything that you have before God and, yeah.... I also think we should do communion more often.*

So, perhaps like many of his peers, Andy deeply values the act of taking communion and its spiritual significance, but is ambivalent about his communicant membership of the church, not least because of his experience of how first communion happens, an experience typical in the North West of Northern Ireland where he lives.

Laura grew up far away in Belfast where such cultural factors are not generally apparent, but she highlighted another reason to help young people understand and experience of sacraments from an early age so that they can be more meaningful later on:

I think growing up I was always a bit... I didn't really know about it, I was naive... and then whenever I saw it being done in church I thought "this is different" and they gave out the cards and things and then people explained that becoming communicant member is how to become part of the church... it was kind of a statement that I was making that, like it was my – like I belonged to the church but also a statement to my family ...that Jesus is my Saviour and I have become part of the church'

For Laura, taking communion for the first time was a meaningful step, but perhaps more in terms of making a statement for her family who did not share her faith than because such meaning had been nurtured by her church community. Helen, comes from a traditional, rural region, but not one known for strong cultural expectations in becoming a communicant; she also expresses a confusion in her comments about both Presbyterian sacraments, nevertheless demonstrates that she, like other strong Christians among the interviewees, valued the act of taking Communion.

*'I became a communicant member...I suppose it was between upper sixth and first year of uni. I became a communicant member in the May following so I was 18, I think. I just felt it was the right thing to do. **Why?** Because I wanted to be baptised and I hadn't been as a child... I don't think it makes a difference; the only difference it makes is you take communion... It is more of a thanksgiving thing you are doing it for really, I know you are remembering Jesus dying but Jesus rose again and I think the way it is done is it is dwelling on Him dying, do it in remembrance of him and all.*

Baptism

Attitudes to the sacraments are further examined concerning baptism, and it is notable that 82.8% of those who answered the question said they had been baptised as infants, with 12 of the 16 who were not baptised as infants having subsequently been baptised as adults.³⁰ Those in South region were most likely to be baptised as infants (94.1%), compared to North (84.2%), East (80.6%) with West significantly less (75.0%) which is unexpected.

With respect to the importance respondents attributed to being baptised, 32.6% said it was Very Important and 39.3% Important, meaning that 28.1% did not consider it to be important to either degree. Although this applies to only 23% of females, 37.5% of males did not deem it to be Very Important or Important.

Regionally, being baptised seems more important to those from churches in North and South regions where those who thought it Very Important or Important totalled 78.9% and 82.4% respectively. In contrast, those from churches in East seemed to value baptism least, as 60.6% did not feel it was Important or Very Important, compared to 41.2% in the South and 32.6% overall. Those from Rural congregations may value baptism more, as only 78.8% described it as Very Important or Important compared to 35.7% of those from Urban congregations.

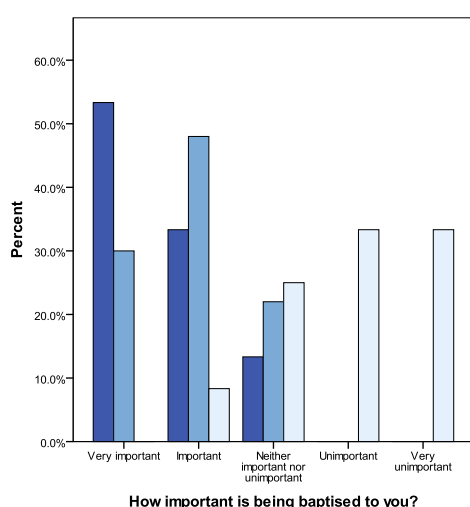


Figure 7.65 importance of baptism by faith (n=93)

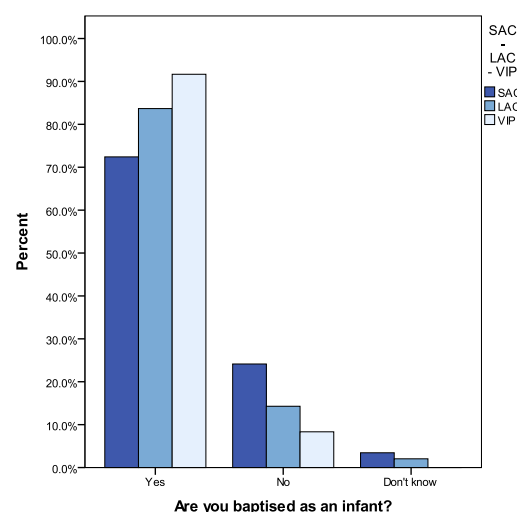


Figure 7.66 baptism by faith (n=90)

³⁰ 3 who were baptised as infants stated that they were also baptised as adults.

53% of SACs said the thought baptism was very important compared to 30% of LACs (figure 7.65). However, it is interesting to note that SACs were less likely than LACs or VIPs to have been baptised as an infant, even though the figures for each group are high (figure 7.66).

Amy admitted that her father's Brethren roots were probably the reason she had never been baptised; *'I have no problem with being baptised it is more I haven't got round to it...I don't really need it, I know my faith, I don't really need to say I'm baptised to tell everyone that I am saved, so don't really see the urgent need for it.'* She later added, *'I think to be baptised or christened in the church you need to be a relevant age to know yourself if you are a Christian because there is no point being baptised if you're not or being christened if you're not going to be a Christian.'*

Andy showed little understanding of the theology of infant baptism, though admitted that if he had any children he would want them to be baptised; however, it was clear that his own baptism means little to him. *'I really don't remember much about it so I probably shouldn't cover it.... I don't really know, baptism it is almost like the done thing as well, it is just... I haven't really considered baptism, I don't know why....but I do think it is important for the parents.'*

Emma's views on baptism were similarly vague. *'I know friends... She was never baptised and it doesn't mean anything to her. That's a hard question because even if I wasn't baptised I'd say I would still have joined the church and still would have become a communicant.'* Helen values her baptism, but has no regrets that this did not happen as an infant, expressing serious doubts about this Presbyterian doctrine:

'I don't really get the infant baptist thing because people just misunderstand it ... there is people who just come to church who are just good living and they think you know "I will just baptise my child and sure she'll get to heaven" ...I'm glad mummy and daddy didn't baptise us and I don't think I'll baptise my children... '

Laura said her baptism as an infant was probably due to the faith influence of her paternal grandparents as her parents do not share her faith, but showed some sense of wishing this had been a believer's baptism as she witnessed friends being baptised, which she seemed to value more than coming to first communion:

'I think if you've come to your own decision on it, it would mean more importance, because I would understand what is happening ...as I am being baptised I think it would be more of a relationship thing with God as opposed to something that... well I suppose at the end of the day baptism for a baby is a nice symbol as well for the parent side and hopefully whenever I have kids I'll get to baptise them as a kid as well.'

Neil also expressed some reservations about his baptism and the value of infant baptism generally: *'I find it difficult to do the baby thing because there is no difference to me than to all the people I know like my brother baptised as an infant. No knowledge, no interest in God. No - to me I would say, it is an interesting question but I would have said that baptism wasn't much. Adult baptism does seem to be a lot and people really get a lot out of it but that is the thing, I feel I don't need to.'*

For those who are more distant from the church, Becca admitted that all her baptism meant was that *'my name is on the christening roll in the church'*. Nicky admitted that her own baptism meant little to her now, but hinted that baptism might appeal to her as a parent if she were to have children with her partner; *'I was ever to have children I would hope that... well, I don't think the Presbyterian Church would let us get them baptised, but it would be something that we would want to do and would look at doing'*.

So overall, not one of the interviewees was able to articulate a reason why their baptism as an infant was an important factor in their current faith and there seemed to be a low degree of theological understanding of the doctrine all round, consistent with the statistical indicators.

Presbyterianism

Even compared to the relatively weak support or levels of understanding of the sacraments, the final doctrinal question demonstrated very poor levels of support for Presbyterian traditions. Adherence to the Presbyterian denomination specifically was seen as very much less important to respondents compared to their opinions about communion or baptism. When asked how important attending a specifically Presbyterian church was to them, only 14.0% said it was Very Important and 19.4% Important; in total 33.4% said it was important to some degree, whereas this figure was almost 60% in responses to similar questions about both Baptism and Communicant membership (figure 7.67)

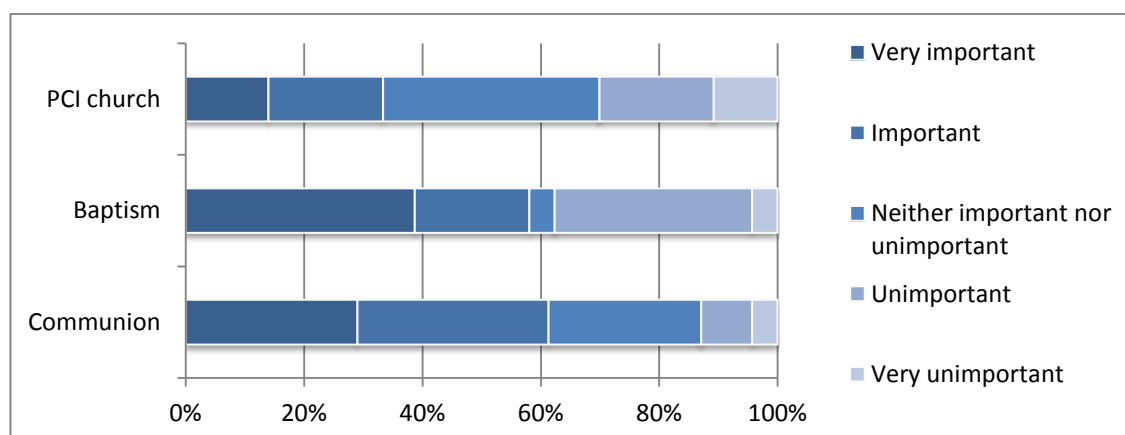


Figure 7.67 importance of Presbyterianism, baptism and communion.

Figure 7.67 shows attitudes to the 3 different aspects of sacrament and doctrine and this shows not only how many do not value each category, but particularly how many fewer are in the very important and important categories regarding how important it is to attend a specifically Presbyterian Church.

Being a Presbyterian was more important to those who belonged to churches in West region where 45% said it was Very Important or Important, and less important to those from East region (27.3% in total); those from South (35.2%) and North (36.8%) were similar and close to the average.

The most notable pattern, however, is by Location as 21.3% of those from Rural churches thought being a Presbyterian is Very Important, compared to 7.1% from Urban churches and 29.8% thought it was Important compared to only 9.5% from Urban congregations who did so. Thus there seems to be an expression of a greater sense of denominationalism being retained in rural churches, and this pattern was mirrored by proportions of those who thought it Unimportant (10.6% Rural against 31.0% Urban) and Very Unimportant (6.4% Rural and 14.3% Urban) (figure 7.68).

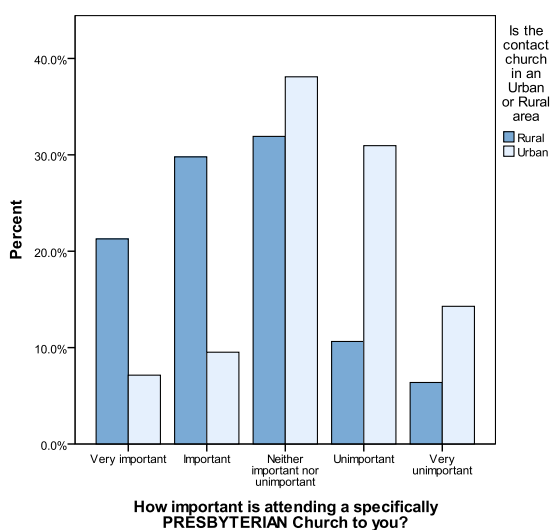


Figure 7.68 importance of Presbyterianism by location (n=90)

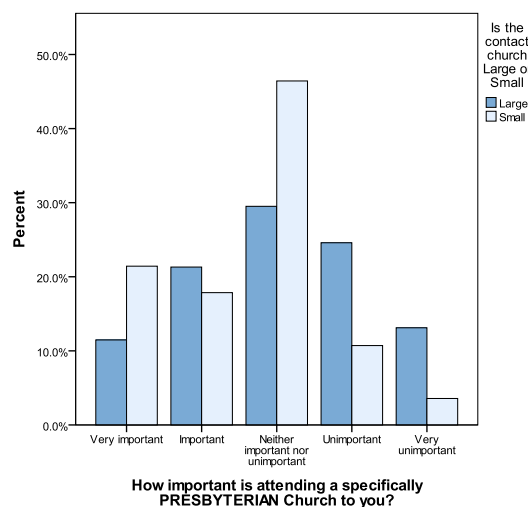


Figure 7.69 importance of Presbyterianism by size (n=90)

Although those from Large congregations were a little less likely to think being a Presbyterian was Very Important or Important (32.8% in combination compared to a total of 39.3% from Small) the notable difference was that those from Large congregation were much more likely to think it Unimportant or Very Important (37.7% compared to 14.3% from Small congregations, figure 7.69).

Neil talked openly about his views about church membership, suggesting that he valued membership as such, but not so much in the formal sense:

*...to me that's not relevant, the whole membership thing... **Your membership, what does membership mean to you?** The membership is being part of the family and I think that the minute anybody walks in the doors they should be a member...church is not a club, church is not a restaurant that we go to and get served, church is a family. I heard a guy say it is a family meal and to me that makes a lot of sense so in terms of membership, it is not important to me cause I also know that, I ask myself would membership be important to God but God says all who believe take part in communion, if you are a believer share this bread and this wine, not if you are a believer but you have also filled in a card so... But then I think I am young and don't have a need to be a member of a church so being a member of the church can be a good thing and there is good to it.*

It is possible that committed Christians like some of those who feature in this study chose a church for all kinds of reasons, many of which may be very legitimate and healthy, but the doctrine and teaching of the denomination are unlikely to be high priorities. Amy gave one example of this: *I don't...it's not a huge significance, I don't really choose it for...because it's Presbyterian, I mostly choose it because I like my minister, I like my friends, it is where I have grown up. There's maybe certain things in other churches like Baptist which I wouldn't necessarily agree with, like having communion every week and things, or... not even that I don't agree with them, it is just not my tradition, not my way that I know about it. **It's not familiar?** But there are some things in the Presbyterian Church which I don't like, you know like you have to go through Kirk Session to get anything approved".*

Helen, spoke of encountering those from other traditions at University and being challenged to consider her own denomination's teaching; *'different churches all coming in together, at the end of the day it is all round the Word and it as good to see that even though sometimes we differed in opinions, you can learn a lot of other denominations'*. Laura too valued being exposed to other Christians in a team setting and said *'it was the first time I stepped into a different pool of Christians and kind of realised there was actually more... obviously there are standard things that they do that are Presbyterian within the church, but no it has never really been a big deal for me to be a Presbyterian and I have never thought it should try and different one, it is where I feel at home.'* Neil also gave little importance to denomination; *'because there are good Presbyterian churches and bad Presbyterian churches, I just wouldn't say that I'd see anything.'*

Of all the interviewees, only Andy was specific about valuing the Presbyterian Church, but even he seemed to struggle to articulate what was most important to him about it.

'I would say it is really important to me... I really like my church's teaching, I think my minister is really good, he always, like his sermons always has a nice introduction and they make sense. Is Presbyterianism important to me...to be honest I think we are all part of Christ's church, and I am a Presbyterian but at the same time I am a Christian, and we are all Christians together.....whenever you come to a Presbyterian church you are there to focus on God and worship Him, whereas other churches it is almost as

like oh look at the pretty pictures and worship God through them rather than focussing on him alone.’ Helen too highlight the importance of preaching in the denomination ‘I wouldn’t be Church of Ireland because their centre point is not the Word, it is what is it – is it the remembrance table or the font or something? It is not, and even in the church buildings the pulpit is not in the middle and I think the pulpit is the centre so that should stay there so I agree with that Presbyterian bit.’

Emma may express a typical view of many of the respondents when she said, ‘I was always brought up ‘it doesn’t matter which church you go to’ – you can go to the Baptist, you can go to the Church of Ireland you can go to the Presbyterian – they’re all the same. Just because you take a different route doesn’t mean you are any less of a person.’ This was articulated further by Helen who said:

I used to be - first year of uni, ‘I’m Presbyterian and proud’, now I am not proud to be a Presbyterian because just of splits and people... I think things like method of baptism and how many times communion is taken shouldn’t even be talked about because everyone just argues about it and I think that is what the devil wants us to do ... I don’t want to be known as Helen the Presbyterian, I want to be known as Helen the Christian.

Participation

To examine levels of participation in church, a number of questions asked respondents directly about how much they felt they were able to play a part in various aspects of church life. When asked about specific youth programmes, 42.4% of respondents said they had ‘A lot’ and 34.8% had ‘some’ opportunity to participate in programmes run for them when they were 11-18 (figure 7.70); 24.7% said they ‘a lot’ and 35.5% some opportunity to have a voice in those programmes and activities (figure 7.71). This suggests a reasonable amount of engagement and participation, but a lot of room for development of youth participation in this area.

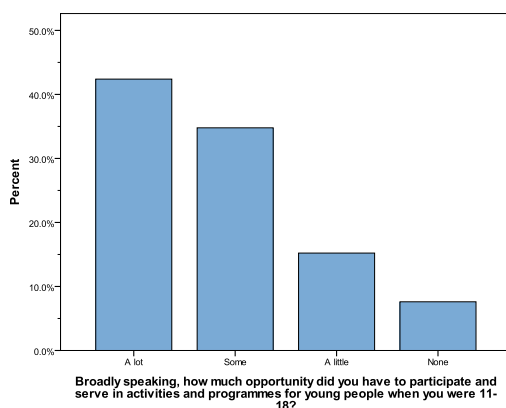


Figure 7.70 opportunities to participate in programmes(11-18) (n=92)

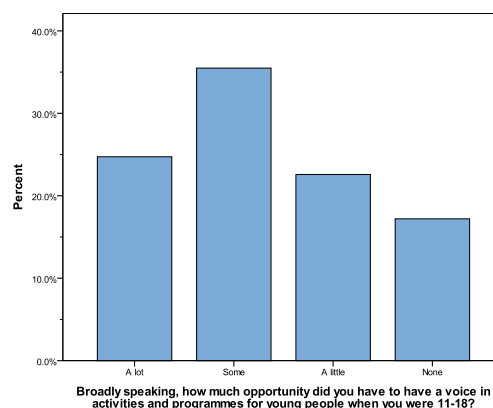


Figure 7.71 opportunities to have a voice in programmes (11-18) (n=93)

However, only 17.2% said they had ‘a lot’ of opportunity to participate in wider church life when they were 11-18, 36.6% saying they had ‘some’ figure 7.72). 42.9% said they had no voice in wider church life when they were 11-18 and 31.9% only ‘a little’ meaning that nearly ¾

of respondents did not feel they had a significant voice (figure 7.73). The more specific question regarding their opportunity to influence church decisions showed an even greater sense of exclusion, 58.7% said they had none and 27.2% 'a little' (figure 7.74).

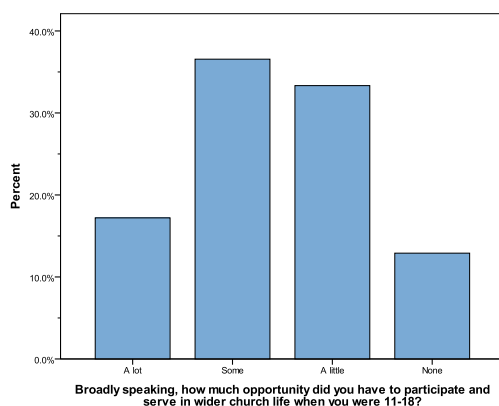


Figure 7.72 opportunity to participate in church (11-18) (n=92)

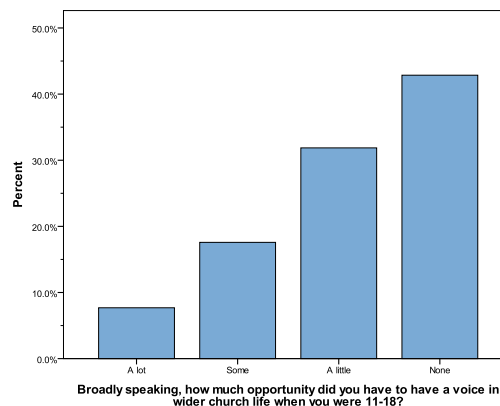


Figure 7.73 opportunity to have a voice in church (11-18) (n=91)

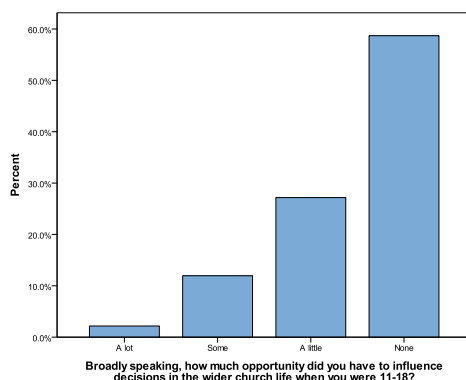


Figure 7.75 shows how the reasonable level of participation in youth programmes was not reflected in opportunities to participate and serve in wider church life. The even greater contrast between youth and church is shown in figure 7.76 in relation to how much respondents felt they had a voice in their own organisations and in wider church issues.

Figure 7.74 opportunities to influence church decisions (11-18) (n=92)

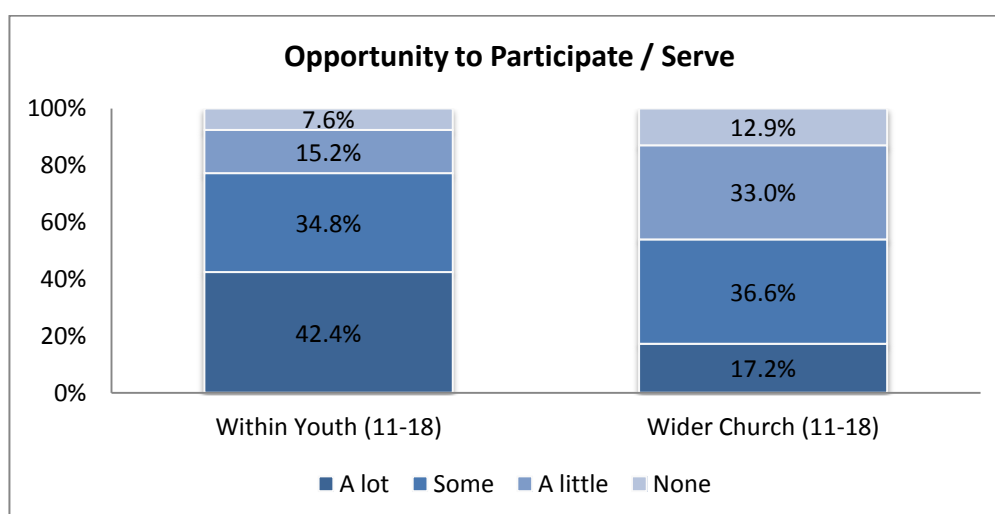


Figure 7.75 opportunities to participate in youth organisations and church life (11-18)

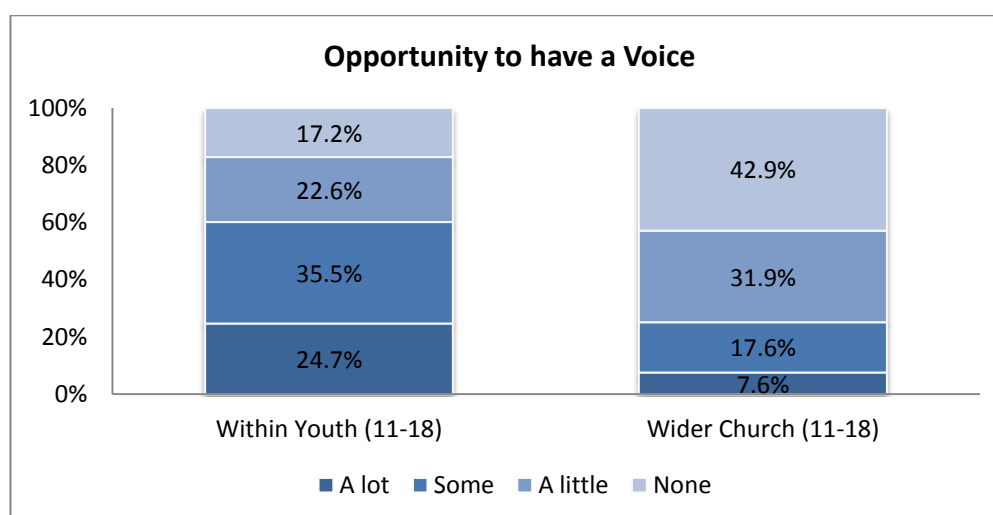


Figure 7.76 opportunities to have a voice in youth organisations and church life (11-18)

It might be expected that such opportunities might increase with age, but responses showed limited increase in current opportunity to be active in church life. The reported opportunity to participate in wider church life increased a little, 28.3% said they now have 'a lot', 31.5% saying they had 'some' (figure 7.77). However, even as emerging adults, 25.0% said they have no voice in wider church life and only 14.1% 'a lot' (figure 7.78). Also 34.1% said they now have no opportunity to influence church decisions and only 9.9% said they had 'a lot' (figure 7.79).

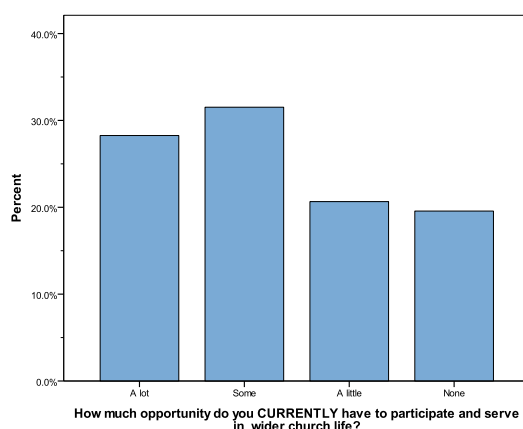


Figure 7.77 opportunities to participate in church life now (n=92)

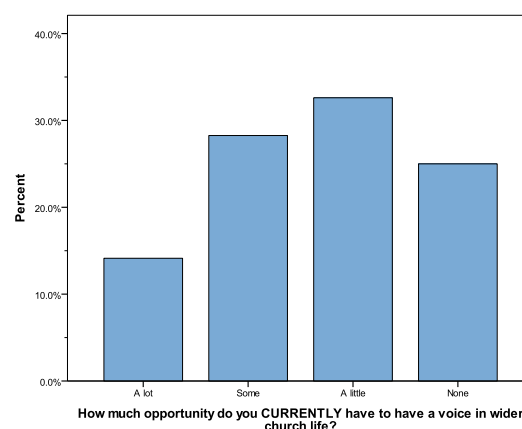


Figure 7.78 opportunities to have voice in church life now(n=92)

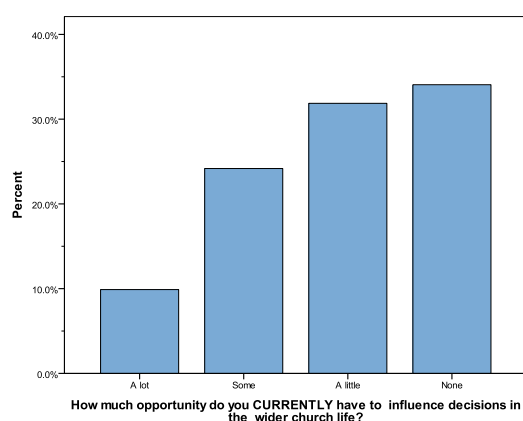


Figure 7.79 opportunities to influence decisions now (n=91)

Opportunities over time between age 11-18 and currently are charted in figures 7.80, 7.81 and 7.82 and these show how little these have changed. The only notable differences are observed at each end of the scale in relation to having a voice and influencing decisions in church life, however, these are not large changes.

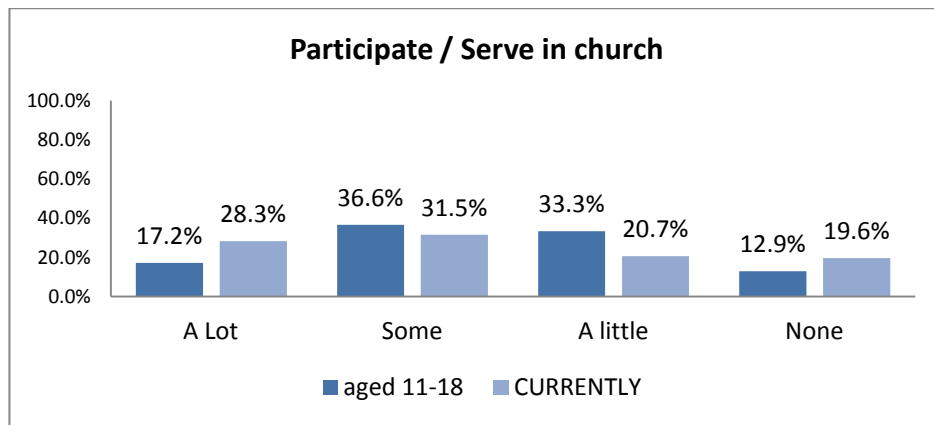


Figure 7.80 opportunities to participate in church (over time)

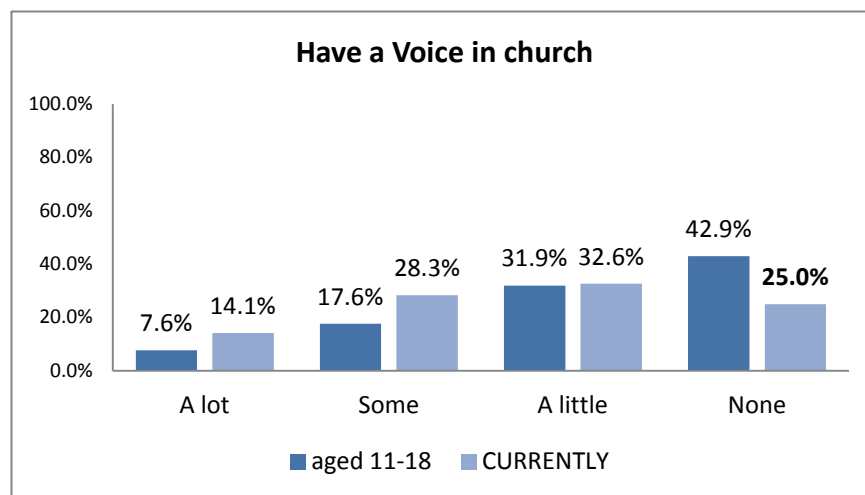


Figure 7.81 opportunities to influence decisions (over time)

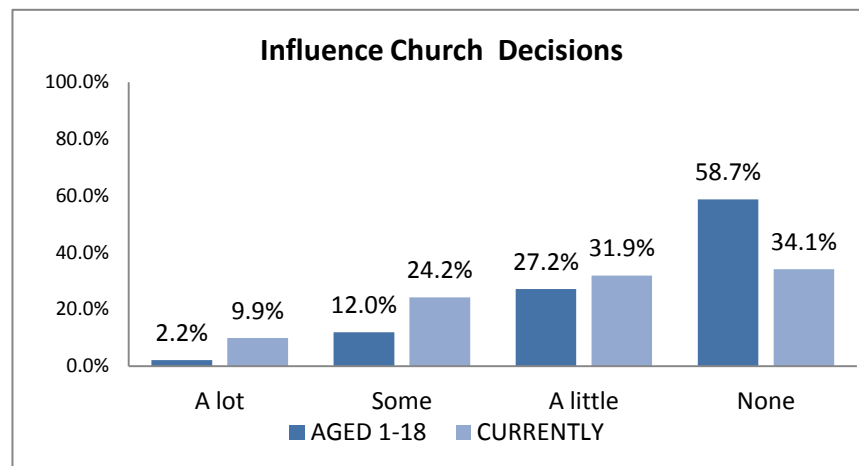


Figure 7.82 opportunities to influence decisions (over time)

There are interesting relationships between previous opportunities for participation and current faith. 63.3% of SACs said they had ‘a lot’ of opportunity to participate in their programmes when 11-18, but only 34.7% of LACs and 25.0 % of VIPs said the same (figure 7.83). Similarly, 43.3% of SACs had ‘a lot’ of opportunity to have a voice in those programmes, compared to 18.0% of LACs (figure 7.84). Thus there appears to be a strong and clear connection between those who have been able to have a lot of meaningful participation in their programmes as teenagers and their faith as emerging adults.

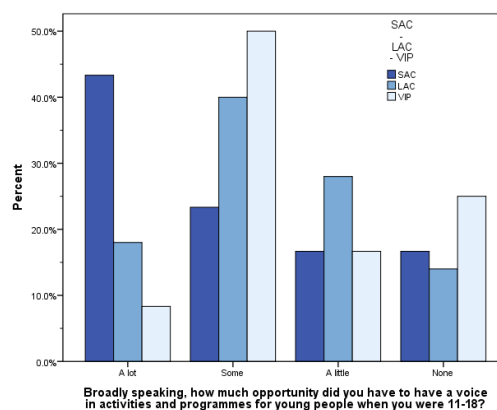
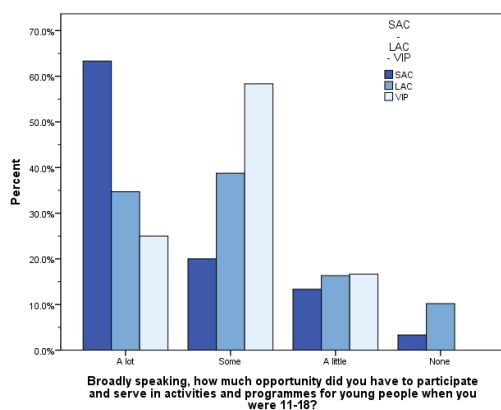


Figure 7.83 opportunity to participate in prog. (11-18) by faith now (n=92) Figure 7.84 opportunity to have voice in prog. (11-18) by faith now (n=92)

The apparent limitations on opportunities for wider church participation as teenagers make it difficult to make similar observations in this area. However, there are interesting patterns regarding current opportunities for participation as they relate to faith. For example, SACs were much more likely to say they have ‘a lot’ of opportunity to participate and serve in wider church life (63.3%) compared with LACs (14.0%) (figure 7.85). Additionally, 30% of LACs say they have ‘a lot’ of opportunity to have a voice in church life compared to only 8.0% of LACs, whereas only 3.5% of SACs said they had no voice in wider church compared to 30.0% of LACs, (figure 7.86). Finally, 20.0% of SACs say they now have ‘a lot’ of opportunity to influence church decisions, contrasting to only 6.1% of LACs (figure 7.87). As previously, it is impossible to ascertain from this whether the participation develops the stronger faith or the faith results in greater participation, but there is little room for doubt that the two are connected.

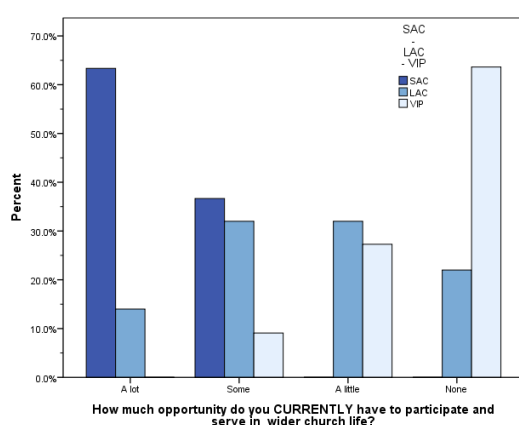


Figure 7.85 opportunity to participate in church now by faith

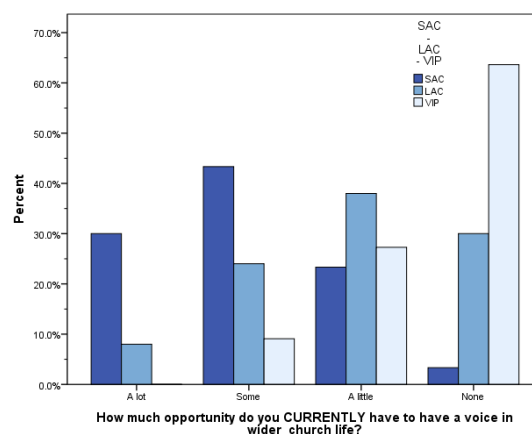


Figure 7.86 opportunity to have a voice in church now by faith

The connection between participation and church attendance pattern is less clear, but there seems to be some connection also. In terms of past opportunities, 50.9% of those now attending weekly saying they had ‘a lot’ of opportunity to participate in and 31.0% a lot of opportunity to have a voice in their programmes; of those who attend 1-3 times per month, only 22.2% and 16.7 %, respectively said the same.

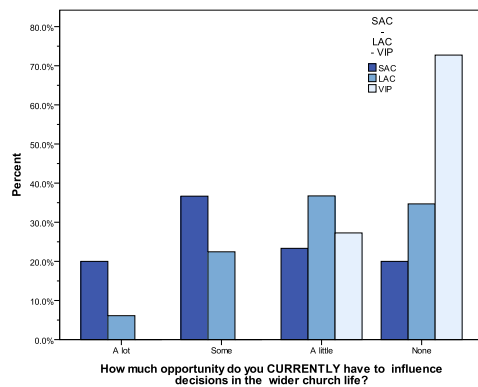


Figure 7.87 opportunity to influence church decisions now by faith

Regarding current opportunities, 37.9% of those who attend church weekly say they now have 'a lot' of opportunity to participate in church life compared to 16.7% of those who attend 1-3 times per month. Only 6.9% of weekly attendees said they had no opportunities in this, whereas almost a quarter (22.2%) of those attending 1-3 times per month have no opportunities.

Many who responded to open questions about significant factors in their continued involvement referred to the importance of having opportunities to participate in congregation's life and decisions. Several respondents mentioned specific roles such as being a Sunday school teacher or playing the piano and others made more general comments about experiences they felt were important, including the following:

- *Having opportunities to serve and knowing that my service is appreciated.*
- *to be involved in worship each Sunday*
- *As long as God is building his Church here, and is calling me to serve here, then I will be involved here by his grace*
- *opportunities to participate in wider church community*
- *The most important thing in keeping me involved is simply that there are opportunities to be involved in.*
- *Keeping young people involved in the decisions of the church*
- *Give young people more of a voice...I think allowing young people some control over services and how some things are run, will make them feel more involved and needed*
- *. Not to be cast aside or looked down upon because we are 'kids' or 'young adults'*

Respondents also made very many comments about the value of opportunities to serve both inside and outside the church, including Scripture Union and C.S.S.M., other summer outreach teams including P.C.I., overseas teams, C.U. / university Christian service and the value of gap year opportunities. The following is a selection of a much greater number of comments:

- *Exodus was significantly important within my Christian development.*

- *CSSM and ministries which serve others practically.*
- *At university in small groups and young adults*
- *Mission trips by myself which pushed myself and my values and faith.*
- *Working with nuns in an orphanage in Tanzania- seeing how they depended on their faith.*
- *PCI year team was invaluable, in helped me mature in my faith and gave me a passion to serve others and work for the furtherment of Gods Kingdom*
- *The summer teams have really helped develop my faith and build relationships with other Christians, while taking me out of my comfort zone. Also GB has played a big part*
- *Social work with disadvantaged people through a faith based organisation.*
- *Becoming a leader at a Scripture Union Camp, taking over as Bible Class leader in September and being a leader at Christian Endeavour*

The following is a selection of comments regarding opportunities to participate and have a voice in the wider church, including many useful reflections which show the wider range of experiences of those who participated in the survey:

- *I feel the elders and leaders in charge of the various organisations within the church have all the power and do not really take on board what others say*
- *Even though I am away during term time at university, I still sit on the Church committee and attend over half of their yearly meetings.*
- *As I am not yet a full communicant member I do not have the right to vote within the church, also as I spend much time and University in Scotland it is not viable to have me serve on any committees in the church, but I do have the opportunity to work a lot with the youth group when I am home*
- *Now I feel I am able to be more vocal and my opinions, though not always wise, are listened to and respected. This may be due to the fact I am now in a place of employment with a church and am known and respected by both elders and church members.*

The following are three longer comments which show a lot of thoughtful consideration about the place of young people in the life and decision-making of the church.

Don't throw them aside and let them have a voice within the church, also try to cater for the young adults needs within the church. Too many people are discontent with change and because of that they prefer to keep things the way it's always been, if this keeps happening then young adults will become disillusioned with Church life as it is and not gain a true passion for serving God. if that role is not catered for then they might stray off and could possibly backslide in their faith.

Let them have a voice, support them in their vision for evangelism and discipleship, and community. Don't let tradition get in the way but make sure that in your wisdom you teach us how to be Holy people of God. Pray for us. Be ok with change as long as it is Biblically sound. If you see positive behaviour within young people encourage it, get on board, walk along side them, show them that because Jesus cares you do.

The interviewees had a mixed experience of opportunity to participate in church life and spoke passionately about this from both a negative and positive perspective. Andy gave a typical reaction. **'How much opportunity do you feel you have had and do have to influence church decisions and to have your voice heard in church?'**

Ahhh...oh, probably not that much'. Amy expressed some frustration about the level of permission required before she and other young people were allowed to follow through on ideas, which she said was stifling. She also expressed some cynicism about the value of having a say in church life; 'They listen to it, but you know the answer is going to be no straight away, which is hard, frustrating'.

The difference between feeling part of youth organisations and feeling part of the church was raised by Helen who was sceptical about the desire of her church to hear the voice of young people, not just due to the realities of financial influence. *'I think like, building work and all you don't really have an opinion if you are a student, you aren't entitled to an opinion because you've no money! So then you aren't really part of it you don't have a voice. I don't think I am in any position to tackle an elder about not doing his job either because I think I am too young, like you know the way I said about elders like if a minister does something out of line or is a dictator it is the elders job to pull him back into line is it not?'*

David had a more positive experience; *'I can't remember anything that I've ever suggested or said was really...It's more of a case of my church with the youth groups and BB and stuff. If you had an idea or something, they would hear your voice and it may be discussed or it might not go any further than that – it would all depend on what way your idea is – is it a viable idea or is it silly or away from what they're looking at'.*

The need to give something back to the church where she had benefitted was a feature of Emma's response to questions on participation. *'Well me, it feels as if I'm doing something for the church - they helped me growing up with GB, with youth club & now I am providing that next generation with that... I can now turn round and go, well, I'm that person for them now. I'm now influencing P1, P2 year olds coming up through the church that have questions'.*

The positive impact of allowing participation was highlighted by Emma who spoke passionately of the impact on even young children who took part in Children's Day services. *'Growing up that's whenever you get heard because... I'm here – see - I'm part of this church'... And in my eyes, that's them shining, that's them having their say in the church'.*

How service can connect individuals to church was also identified by Nicky, especially from her own experience, when asked about what keeps young people involved in church. *'I suppose it was more in my church when I started doing the PowerPoint and things like that, because then people started seeing you as an important member of the church and you are valued. Obviously if I wasn't to turn up today we're not having PowerPoint or that sort of thing. ... if you are involved, even if your faith does falter but you know that you are meant to be doing something every week in church you're going to keep coming. So I think having a role does'.*

The interviewees had some constructive ideas as recommendations to the church. Amy said *'Give them more roles, you know in school how they have a student council, why can't the church have something like that but actually listen to them, you know, have regularly meetings, say what the kids wanted to do'*. Amy also recommended establishing forums to enable young people's opinions to be heard; *'I don't want to say forced but strongly encouraged that every church has a student council and just how to form it and what it would involve and what the meetings would involve or what they can decide...'*

Andy agreed with such a suggestion, saying *'I think the best way is through discussions like, in an environment where the likes of people my age are more comfortable'*. Emma had some clear advice on this also; *'Listen to them more. Some of the elders...most of our elders are, what, 70, 80 years old, 60 odd and think "they're just teenagers – they don't know what...they have no thought, they may leave next year, they may leave next week. What's the point in asking them whenever they may not be here to see the outcome?" I think, it doesn't matter what age you are, I think the church should always listen to what you say.'*

Becca encouraged the practice of young people being able to take services on regular intervals. There was a word of caution from Laura, however, who warned against allowing young people to take on heavy responsibility without the necessary training and preparation. On the matter of teaching the Bible she said *'the Bible says that is really, really big, teachers are the most highly scrutinised but I was giving talks and I was able to get up the front and talk about God and I don't even know if what I was saying was true, so not too much of a voice but I needed to be trained and equipped just as much as I needed to speak'*.

Helen had some clear thinking about not just the importance of giving young people a meaningful way to participate in church life, but the principles around which that should be practiced. She was particularly keen that young people actively seek to change the culture of church and establish new traditions which are positive and enduring:

'It is going to have to start changing now, it will not change immediately but our generation has to change that. Like there is no point going out of church now and saying old people you have to let the young people have their voice, 'cause they will be like "they haven't done it, like they have only been in the church, or been active in the for about 3 years so what is the point of letting them do it?" ...Well first of all, they have to pray for it and they have to pray accepting that there has to be change...so they need to spur our generation up and prepare us for the change, so ...So if we are mentored by the older ones, we can mentor the younger ones. Prayer, support, mentor and I guess the opportunity to do it and not put us in a box.'

Developmental needs

Only 40.7% of respondents said their church has specific provision for 18-25s, and just 23.1% attend such provision (figure 7.88). There is some indication of a relationship between such provision and faith and attendance patterns as 40.0% of SACs are involved in provision for 18-25s compared to 16.3% of LACs (figure 7.89, table 7.14). It may be significant that 24.5% of LACs did not know whether there was such a group or programme for them in their congregation. In relation to church attendance, 32.1% of those who attend church weekly also attend a young adult's programme, but only 5.6% of those who attend 1-3 times per month attend such a group. Put another way, almost two thirds of weekly attendees have a young adults programme, whereas less than half of those attending 1-3 times per month do so (figure 7.90).

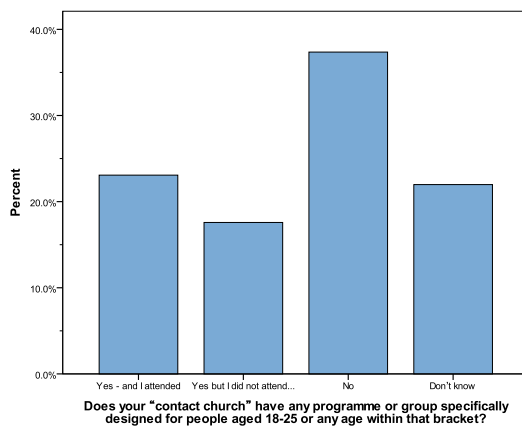


Figure 7.88 existence of 18-25 programme (n=91)

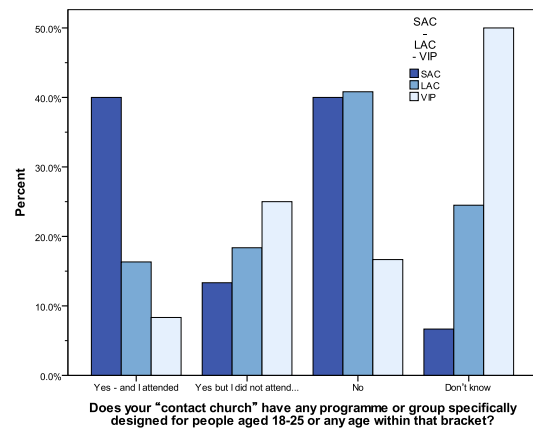


Figure 7.89 existence of 18-25 programme by faith now (n=91)

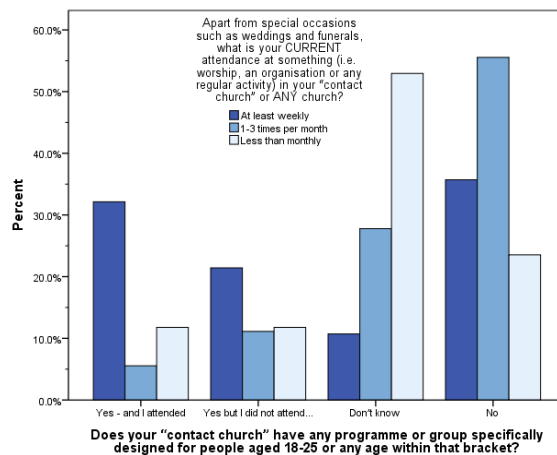


Figure 7.90 existence of 18-25 programme by attendance now (n=91)

The need to cater specifically for the needs of 18-25s was frequently mentioned in open answers to a question about what was important in keeping them involved in church, as illustrated by these examples:

- *There is a definite need to provide organisations or opportunities for socialising amongst the 18-25 age group*
- *Attending young adults group has kept me involved with those that are my age*
- *Having relevant teaching for my age and position as a young single female student*

Does your 'contact church' have any programme or group specifically designed for people aged 18-25 or	SAC - LAC – VIP							
	LAC		SAC		VIP		Total	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Yes - and I attended	12	40.0%	8	16.3%	1	8.3%	21	23.1%
Yes but didn't attend	4	13.3%	9	18.4%	3	25.0%	16	17.6%
No	12	40.0%	20	40.8%	2	16.7%	34	37.4%
Don't know	2	6.7%	12	24.5%	6	50.0%	20	22.0%
Total	30	100.0%	49	100.0%	12	100.0%	91	100.0%

Table 7.14 existence of 18-25 programme by faith now

When asked specifically about the needs of 18-25s, there was again a lot of support for specific provision for this age group, but recognition of the need to be connected to the body of believers of all ages. The emphasis was on providing a relaxed environment, good leadership, strong community and growth together. Very many comments concerned respondents views on the most important aspects of such a provision and the following are illustrations of these:

- *A social aspect and a place for young leaders who serve in the church to have a place to learn themselves.*
- *genuine real discussion about real life and accountability to each other, non judgemental atmosphere. good solid bible teaching to feed us spiritually so we can stand up for what we believe in with confidence. apologetics*
- *I currently have started a small group aimed specifically at this age range, I think one of the most important aspects of this is that the people attending the group don't feel like they are a 'young person' but rather an adult with a vital role in the group, a voice and the ability to have an impact. also there can be a feeling that the group is separate of all other church things because of the age range so I think reinforcing that this is still part of the church and trying to find ways and means to show this.*
- *It is an opportunity for people of a similar age and amount of life experience to come together and share with one another*
- *Spiritual development and friendship - those aged 18-25 are often very busy juggling school/uni/work with friends and serving in church. It can be difficult to be disciplined enough to have some quiet time with God amongst this busy-ness.*
- *support from the older people in church*
- *to me this age group is not acknowledged in my church we are left out on a limb too old for youth club and too young for any other group.*
- *Thank you for taking the time to consider how the church can meet the needs of this sometimes seemingly lost age group.*

Some gave reasons why they didn't attend programmes for young adults, including having other regular commitments (work, babysitting, living or working away from home) or other practical reasons such as the night which it met. However several mentioned issues about the dynamic of such a group, such as how welcome they would feel or who it was aimed at. Some said they did not know anyone there, that they felt it was too old or geared for young married couples rather than under 25s who are more likely to be single.

The following longer statements show that some of the respondents had strongly held and through-through opinions on the place of emerging adults in church.

- *in our church we are always told about being an influence on the younger youth fellowship by getting alongside them and having fun with them and building relationships so that if they felt they couldn't speak to an elder or church leader they could come to one of us for support, but also I feel that the young adults also need support from the older people in the church to do the same for them and encourage us in our faith too. The biggest part of my learning and growth in the faith has been from having fellowship with older believers outside of church and in our normal conversations. If churches had a better community spirit I feel they would know one another better and it would be easier to approach each other if there is ever a problem, the relationships will be built on friendships and we would feel more like a body together.*
- *I found my views on many things during this time changed and that although I am grateful for my upbringing in the church it left me very sheltered. I think that churches need to allow young people to question the churches accepted view on some topics... I have also never been as busy as I have been during the last few years - churches need to understand that young people developing careers, studying, maintaining friendships, developing relationships, maintaining family relationships and in some cases looking after children.*
- *I think that between 18-25 many young adults go to university (maybe in England), get jobs, get married etc. and therefore because of all the changes that they are going through, can find it hard to stay involved in church life*

The interviewees were also keen to give their thoughts on the needs of people in aged 18-25 and their place in the church. Some expressed helpful thoughts on the developmental issues faced by people their age, such as Amy who expressed the following:

'Whenever I turned 18 I was so scared, "oh my goodness, I'm so not an adult, why have I turned 18?" ... I still feel very vulnerable at times - still need a cuddle from my daddy or a snuggle from my mum at night you know...I think it is quite daunting, especially with all the recession ...I try to think well "God has my life sorted so I don't really need to worry about it", but it is hard!'

Helen said *'I don't think you're a proper adult, I don't think you are recognised as an adult 'til you are married. That's what I feel. So if you are never married, you will never be an adult?'* (both laugh). Aye *'til you're that age group everyone else... I feel like the ones in our church recently there has been 4 couples that have got married that were part of our youth but as soon as they got married they step away from the youth they are away from young adults now'.*

Despite her independence from an early age, Nicky was realistic about the age when she believes someone becomes an adult. *'I don't think anyone every really feels like they are an adult, I don't know, I think, I always want someone that I can run back to if something goes wrong and I always want a support network around me that....* Becoming an adult concerns maturity as far as Laura was concerned; *'I think that involves becoming more mature and because I am going to have to live on my own and do things for myself I suppose. Yeah, just a maturity.'*

Neil raised a number of cultural and social issues such as sex and alcohol as being vital considerations for emerging adults, saying that the church needs to help them to respond to the challenges associated with these; *'Equipping people to say no with reasons I would say is a good thing'*. Nicky also raised some of the other pressures which people her age face and suggested that the church can support them specifically at their stage of life:

'there is lots of big decisions and big changes that happen between the ages of 18 and 25 like, realistically most people meet their future other half's in that sort of time so I suppose as stupid as it sounds education and different things around that financial education, just a lot of areas that nowhere really covered, I know churches are supposed to be about nurturing your faith with God and things like that I think there is room to look at helping young people in, not more practical ways but you know, your faith comes into your relationship if financial difficulties come.

Becca highlighted that those in her age group may often be working irregular hours, (*'People work all the time'*), and therefore may need a more flexible response from churches, such as a choice of times to meet. In terms of how to reach others in her generation who, like her, are currently outside the church, she suggested events which engage on topical issues of interest; *'even something silly like you know that Dawkins guy you know maybe like if the church was to have a lecture actually debating it like having 2 different people talking about it – something like that. Obviously there are a lot of things out there where trying to say faith doesn't exist, God doesn't exist and things like that'*. Emma also spoke of peers from her church who have drifted; *'I would say out of 10-15 in my age group there are only 4 who have come back to church. ...they felt 'I'm gonna get judged for coming back after being absent for 2 or 3 years off at Uni'. **Did they actually say that?** In not so many words but it came that sort of way, that they felt to themselves that if they came back they would have got judged for not being at church more often'*.

Andy was keen to point out that the needs of emerging adults had implications for the church in response. *'This is a time in your life whenever there is quite a lot of change going on, for me being at university or other people getting jobs, probably knowing that the congregation is praying for you is one of the most important things, at times like this I know I want to feel part*

of the church at home, like being away I don't want to not... come home and not be a part of it anymore. Probably being in contact and showing that you are an important part of the church, maybe some of the elders contacting you and definitely knowing that people are praying for you'.

The place of emerging adults within the wider church community was referred to often, such as comments from Andy:

'You really want to get a sense of community, don't you? I think the sense of community and the sense that you are loved by the church, and how important you are to that church, I want to feel that you are a part of that, you definitely want their prayers and support in every way like the minister contacting me is a big one as well and showing that they care and just reminding that no matter where you go like whether I am that side of the street or the other side of the world, that Jesus is with you, God is with you where ever you go and that your church is always supporting always, like something to lean on whenever you need, you need help or support or whatever and that someone is just a phone call away, like it doesn't matter if you come from a Christian household in that respect like, that there is someone there from your church that cares...'

Neil put it this way: *'I think something that happens at 18 is that as soon as you turn 18 you are not in the youth group so you instantly become a leader of the youth group. It's important to remember that we still need all kinds of serving,... also that slowly mix into the real church,'.*

Finally, in terms of thoughts on where the church needs to focus to engage effectively with emerging adults, Becca gives an interesting perspective from someone who is no longer involved in church:

'Obviously, if they started doing debates like I was saying earlier I would definitely be along and drink my cup of tea. Definitely, you know, although my faith isn't there now I do or as I've quite rightly said that I'm glad, I don't regret my upbringing and I would want my children raised in the same way'

As for the needs of Christian emerging adults, there were a number of key issues raised by the interviewees. Emma highlighted the need for developmentally appropriate pastoral care; *'Support when times are tough, would it be going through exams, would it be going through (heaven forbid) family death, family splitting up, just somebody who will sit down and go...talking to that... because things like that...just being there and supporting them. I think that's what the church needs to do more.'* As Laura put it, *'Just support them and love them!'*

Summary

This has been a lengthy analysis of the large amount of data which came from the questionnaires and interviews, but a number of linked themes have emerged. Connection with home and family can make a difference to an individual's faith development, and parents can be a key influence. However it is not simply a matter of the parents having a Christian faith, but the nature of their relationship with their children and the way that faith is expressed, both within the family home and outside. However it seems that family faith practices are somewhat inconsistent and that few have grown up in a household where faith is woven into everyday life. In some cases it is the influence of extended family which has been more significant, particularly grandmothers.

The influence of church community is also very important and it appears that this can be a very strong influence on faith development, or in contrast, can increase the likelihood of a young person leaving. There are key people who have the potential to make a difference, including friends, leaders, youth workers and older adults and where these people engage intentionally and effectively, this can be a strong influence on enduring faith and church connection.

Young people's relationship to the doctrine and sacrament of the church is another very significant issue; it appears that even those who are spiritually mature and motivated may have a very limited understanding of the importance of sacraments and give an even smaller value to the distinctiveness of the Presbyterian denomination. Missing the potential to engage young people in church community through their appreciation of sacrament and doctrine can be balanced in some cases where young people have been able to participate meaningfully in the life and decision-making of their congregation, but these have been in the minority. However there is a lot of room for churches to engage teenagers and emerging adults in the service and decision-making of the church in order to integrate them more fully into the faith community.

Finally, those emerging adults who are most strongly connected to their church seem to have a combination of a safe place to socialise and explore their faith with their peers, while at the same time feeling rooted in the wider intergenerational church family which is willing to care for and mentor them.

The implications of these findings need finally to be considered within the context of the issues raised in the earlier chapters, with thought given to the learning which can be made available to church practice.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This has been an examination of the place of emerging adults within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, within the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland, seeking to understand the factors which are important to their continued connection and involvement in the church, in particular assessing the impact of the quality of covenantal, intergenerational community. This concluding chapter will summarise the development of the thesis and the results of the empirical research, before seeking to draw conclusions, firstly against the hypothesis set and then regarding implications for future practice.

Summary

The first chapter examined the history and origins of Presbyterianism in Ireland, highlighting the importance of these foundations to the identity and distinctiveness of the denomination, in particular the reformed, covenantal theological basis. Similar to most denominations, there has been a general numerical decline which has been most marked in the volume of children and young people involved in church, and yet the young are theoretically of special importance to Presbyterians. Intergenerational family community has been extremely important in Presbyterian historical development, but like other aspects of outworking of the practical covenantal theology, it appears to have declined in priority.

Other aspects of practice which are central to Presbyterianism include the sacraments of baptism and communion which are seen as signs and seals of God's covenant. Baptism affords a means of membership to people from infancy, and is intended to provide an assurance and affirmation of faith as the individual grows up through childhood and into adulthood as they trust the covenant promises of God. Communion is intended to affirm that membership, perpetuating a sense of belonging to the faith community, whilst also giving regular encouragement to personal and corporate faith. Within this covenantal theological context, the intentional passing on of faith to the next generation is also a fundamental concept. This traditionally happened through the learning of doctrine in the catechism and in the routine passing on of faith within home and family, both of these rooted firmly in the context of the wider intergenerational community. There has also been a significant decline in recent years in the influence of both catechism and the Christian home and a corresponding decrease in the profile of the foundational theology of the church.

The second chapter traced the history of youth and children's ministry in the denomination, from its origins in education, through the development of Sunday school in the late 18th century. The emergence of the first youth organisations in the late 19th century was followed by the growth of uniformed organisations and then more informal youth work; all of these developed mostly independently from each another and without central direction from the church, so each engaged with young people in their own way and grew in their own directions. Although the level of central Presbyterian organisation of youth and children's ministry grew gradually from the 1950s to the 1980s, it was not really until the 1990s that there was a concerted attempt to influence the way the church, and each congregation engaged with children and young people. Youth events and training programmes were held which sought to promote creative and intentional youth ministry and key values and principles were encouraged, such as the promotion of strongly relational rather than purely program-driven ministry. The desire for the integration of youth and children's ministry into the wider context of the church was underlined in 2004 by the establishment of the Board of Youth and Children's Ministry in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland; this continued to promote key strategic priorities, in particular the growing awareness that youth ministry needed to reconnect with the faithful theological origins of the denomination. In the context of decreasing numbers and a move away from the covenantal foundations of youth ministry, there has also been a growing emphasis by the Youth and Children's Board on reintegrating youth and children's ministry in the intergenerational church family context.

Chapter 3 carried out a detailed examination of the developmental issues relating to 18 to 25 year olds and their transition to adulthood. Traditional theories of development were considered before examining new approaches to youth and young adult development and the theory that 'emerging adulthood' is a new and distinctive phase of development (Arnett, 2000). Theories of identity development and individualisation were examined along with theories of faith development, leading to the conclusion that there needs to be a holistic approach to development. The full range of psycho-social elements of development must be recognised in order to adequately understand how teenagers move towards social and spiritual maturity; the full context of an individual's identity development must be considered.

Three concepts were proposed as a framework to this study. Firstly the idea of *Faith Capital*, namely the resources which an individual must acquire in order to reach spiritual maturity and personal faith; secondly *Spiritual Individualisation*, an intentional process of supporting young people towards spiritual maturity which is, active rather than passive; and finally the importance of *Agency and Structure* was identified, where the individual's family, peers and faith community provide the essential relational context to move towards holistic maturity.

The next two chapters examined the factors which are active when emerging adults cease their involvement in church and proposed practices which may help to keep them involved. The decline in research into young people leaving the church is attributed to a general acceptance of some traditional explanations based on variables such as education, secularisation, life stage, cognitive dissonance and the decreased influence of family. However, it is argued that none of these alone is sufficient to explain what, in essence, is a complex process in which an individual's faith may decrease in priority, but not necessarily in profession ultimately. Four key areas are proposed as helpful in understanding the process of leaving or staying in church, which uniquely impact each individual in combination, such that no simple explanation can be offered. This is especially important to understand within the framework of emerging adulthood in which each individual is believed to develop their own identity in their own unique way, in other words there is no 'one size fits all' but a number of themes which are important to consider for each person. Therefore the four areas are proposed as a broad combined framework in which to examine emerging adults leaving or staying in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

The first area concerns the *influence of family* on faith development, in particular moving beyond the traditional and simplistic notion of church attendance, and taking into account the spiritual maturity of the parents and the relationship they have with their children. The way parents express their faith should be more than transmissional (where it is modelled), but rather be transactional (intentionally weaving faith into family life) and transformational (where young people are enabled to play a part in the wider community). The second area of interest is also relational, namely the importance of *faith community* and the covenantal context in which young people are involved. There is a particular need to consider the influence of peers, the role of intergenerational relationships, conjunctive faith and what is referred to as 'sacred umbrellas', portable relational aspects of community which will provide the necessary context for faith development. The third important area relates to the level of *participation* of young people and Emerging Adults in the life and work of both their organisations and in wider church life, and their ability to have a voice which is heard in church decision-making context. This has a very important impact on the sense of belonging experienced by an individual and the extent to which they feel their presence makes a difference. Finally, it is suggested that the level to which the *developmental needs* of an individual are considered and met is crucial to effectively and intentionally encourage them towards faith maturity. Thus it was proposed that emerging adults are more likely to remain connected to church through to adulthood through a unique combination of these experiences:

1. *A positive Christian home experience which naturally and intentionally nurtures faith.*
2. *A strong connection to an intergenerational faith community.*
3. *A meaningful role and voice as an integrated member of that wider church.*
4. *A nurturing of faith in ways which reflect their individuality and developmental stage.*

These are reflective of the covenantal context in which the Presbyterian Church intends to raise young people in the Christian faith, recognising the role of family, church family and community engagement, whilst acknowledging individual needs of each member.

The research was completed with 18-25s who were mostly still connected to the church, but some were (by self-report) more spiritually active than others; they were a 10% representative sample of congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland, taking into consideration the region, location and size of their congregation. 98 valid questionnaires provided useful answers to a large number of questions relating to each of the four major themes, with very valuable additional material from 9 in-depth interviews with a selection of respondents.

Results

The detailed quantitative and qualitative results will be summarized in relation to the evidence they provided to support the proposal that a combination of the four proposed variables determines how likely an individual emerging adult is to remain connected to the church.

Faith and faithlessness

Most of the respondents reported having a Christian faith; 32.6% said they were 'Strong and Active Christians' (labelled 'SAC') and 54.4% 'Less Active Christians' ('LAC'). The remaining 13.0% in various ways reported having no faith, either having once professed faith or never having done so, and these were labelled 'VIP' ('Variously Inactive People') as they were the key group which inspired the study, though unfortunately were only a small group of respondents. Interviewees and those who answered open-ended questions in the questionnaire suggested that there are many other factors which cause faith to ebb and flow other than the congregation in which they grew up. These included having a healthy environment in which to learn faith and feel accepted; additionally living away from home may also have influenced future faith, though any impact is not simple.

Family: parents, practice and other influences

There appears to be a correlation between having a close relationship with one's mother as an emerging adult and both frequency of attending church and having a strong faith. A father may have a positive influence on future church attendance of their children if he both attends and is actively involved during the child's teenage years. Those who said either parent had an outstanding or strong and open faith also appear more likely to be involved in church and have a more active faith, but those whose parents were less expressive of their faith seem to have experienced a more negative impact on their faith and church attendance. Interviewees also provided evidence for the idea that parents are much more likely to influence their children's faith if they convey an open and committed faith rather than a more private and reserved one.

Family faith practice, such as prayers and discussions about faith, appears to be very much in decline. The establishment of regular church attendance patterns as a family in childhood and adolescence may increase attendance into emerging adulthood, but those who experienced this were also more likely to report they now had a Less Active Faith (LAC). It appears that young people's experience of faith growing up at home does impact them, but the impact is complex and intentional faith practice in Christian homes is generally irregular. Grandparents may also play a significantly positive role in nurturing faith, especially Christian grandmothers.

Faith community: influences, experiences and sacramental factors

A large number of variables can lead an individual emerging adult to sufficiently feel part of a church community that they are likely to remain active there. Some are more difficult to quantify, such as the tendency of those from South or West regions to be more likely to express a feeling of belonging. The influence of more personal factors seems to be stronger however, not least the influence of certain individuals: peers, youthworkers, and volunteer leaders were most likely to be named as having a positive influence on faith and spiritual development. In particular, it is important for these people to be 'very helpful' to someone's faith development, as opposed to just 'helpful'. When peers, volunteers, paid youth workers and also other adults, (especially if they spoke about faith 'very regularly'), had a particularly helpful relationship, this was likely to significantly impact the faith of emerging adults.

Evidence from the interviewees in particular supports the idea that it is those who form significant relationships from these four groups who have most impact on faith. Creation of meaningful community with Christians of different ages has a particular impact on the current faith of emerging adults, and substantial evidence from the interviewees showed their positive experience of intergenerational community, with the impact of negative experiences too.

There was striking evidence that emerging adults may not value their baptism or communicant membership, even if they had strong and active faith. A minority felt it important to attend a Presbyterian church specifically and there was little evidence that young people value traditional Presbyterian doctrine and theology. Even the more spiritually committed interviewees were unable to articulate the value of baptism, give reasons to be a communicant member, (other than the value of taking communion) or to value Presbyterian loyalty.

Participation

Although there is some evidence that young people have opportunities to participate in their own programmes and have a voice within these, they appear to have much less opportunity when it comes to participation in the wider church. However, those with a strong faith (SAC) were much more likely to say they had such opportunities both within their programmes and in wider church. There was considerable support for strongly encouraging churches to enable young people's voices to be heard at all levels and to help them to find appropriate opportunities to serve and put their faith into practice.

Individual developmental needs

There may be a connection between those who have opportunities to attend a programme specifically aimed at 18-25 year olds and both those with a stronger faith and those who attend church more frequently. There was significant support for such provision and creating community which cares for each person of that age in an individual way, ensuring not only that they have a place to develop their faith in a safe and developmentally appropriate way, but also that each individual is pastorally cared for in a way which was appropriate for them.

Related to this, there were frequent references to the need to follow up on individuals who no longer attend and do more to keep open avenues which might allow them to return. There is a suggestion that those who are physically absent may not be so far away spiritually and emotionally, but that some proactive follow-up may be fruitful in many cases.

Evidence for hypotheses

It was proposed that emerging adults are subject to variables or influences which impact each person in a potentially unique combination; any individual is more likely to remain close to the church if they experience a positive permutation of four outlined variables and the specific evidence from the research for each of these will now be examined.

Family: a positive Christian home experience which naturally and relationally nurtures faith.

There is evidence that Christian homes are influential, but not always in a uniform or positive way. Where parents live out an open faith with integrity, this seems to positively influence the future faith of their children; however, the exercise of intentional faith practices in Christian homes appears to be inconsistent and in decline. Also, the need to consider the wider family context is important, as grandmothers in particular can play a vital role in the unique combination of factors experienced by an individual. This is all consistent with the proposition that faith must be more than transmissional, but rather should be transactional and transformational. Where there is consistent faith in the family of origin, this may give the best conditions for the passing on of faith. It is also important to note that those with a strong faith (SACs) and those who attend church weekly were more likely than other respondents to say that their relationship with their mother was 'very close', indicating the value of strong relational bonds within families into emerging adulthood, especially maternal relationships.

Community: a strong connection to an intergenerational faith community.

There is support for the idea that, rather than casual involvement in church with superficial or functional relationships, young people who experience significant support to their faith from a friend, volunteer leader, paid youth worker or other adult of faith in their congregation are more likely to have a stronger faith as an emerging adult. Having regular opportunities to be part of intergenerational activities also seems to have a very significant impact on their faith. Those with a strong and active faith (SAC) were more likely to say that being a communicant member and being baptised was important to them. However, there is strong evidence that few young people are able to articulate an appreciation of the importance of sacraments and how they might have a positive impact their faith. It appears that many are missing out on the affirmative value of sacrament and a sound doctrinal understanding, but that those who have some sense of conjunctive faith, perhaps under a 'sacred umbrella', including a variety of peer and older Christian support, are more likely to be affirmed in their faith identity or belonging.

Personal (active participation): a meaningful role and voice, integrated into the wider church.

Young people have limited opportunities for participation, especially in the wider church, but there is a clear connection between such opportunities and having strong and active faith. Greater opportunities are needed to actively participate in and influence church life and undoubtedly this is an important influence in how much an individual feels involved and committed to local church.

Personal (individual needs): their faith is nurtured in a way which reflects their individuality and developmental stage.

The research gives firm support for giving emerging adults a safe place where they can develop their faith in a manner which is suited to their developmental needs, but that they are also eager to be part of a wider community which individually and actively cares for them. Overall, it appears to be necessary to adopt a holistic approach to developing faith and faithfulness among young people. It is beneficial to actively encourage each individual towards their *spiritual individualisation* by being enabled to find a place in a safe, supportive environment which helps them to develop a personal faith which is yet rooted in covenant community. The proposed concept of *agency and structure* is also affirmed, as lasting faith appears to thrive if nurtured in the right environment where young people can connect meaningfully with peers, leaders and other adults, as well as the important role of the family, where faith is actively developed there. It is not simply a matter of providing information or knowledge but, through effective *agency and structure*, providing the essential relational framework for mature faith to develop. Finally, the notion of *faith capital* is supported by the interviewees who highlighted the importance of the people and experiences which enabled them to develop a mature faith.

Implications for practice

The conclusions regarding the hypotheses have important implications for practical theology; given the evidence supporting the value of covenantal, intergenerational community as defined by the four identified variables, it is important to extrapolate how this might be worked out in practice. As the intended outcome is to keep emerging adults closer to Presbyterian churches, the results have revealed general trends in practical theology which support this end within the covenantal framework. There are six areas of practice which are proposed on the basis of these results, with the support of additional material where useful, which locates such practice in the wider theoretical and empirical environment:

1. Family - support and resource families to nurture transactional and intentional faith.
2. Community - encourage churches to reframe themselves as intergenerational faith communities.
3. Community - re-imagine the role of sacrament and doctrine.
4. Personal - strategically facilitate youth participation in all of church life.
5. Personal - ensure individual developmental needs of emerging adults are addressed.
6. Personal - vigorously develop a more proactive approach to those who stop attending.

1. *Departed or drifted?*

Vigorously develop a more proactive approach to those who have stopped attending.

Nicky was one of the small number contacted who no longer have regular contact with church and she expressed a common experience when she said 'I think there's a lot of influences and factors the older you get; I've taken a step away from the church'. Even though each situation is unique and there is a great variety of experiences of those who stop attending, there is much which can be learned in general from those like Nicky.

Becca stated that she and her siblings had been completely ignored by her previous church after the breakup of her family; 'nobody's made any contact with me and as far as I know nobody has made any contact with my brother or sister, to see how we're doing'. Nicky also expressed a similar desire to know she had been missed but said that 'the church weren't interested in where I'd gone... it would have been nice to hear, 'you are still welcome here...'. Becca said that with the right invitation she would 'definitely be along to drink my cup of tea! Although my faith isn't there now...I don't regret my upbringing and would want my children raised in the same way'. Churches may be encouraged by the experience of David who received a pastoral visit when in hospital, after which he felt able to return to church following a period of absence. The evidence from surveys and interviews is consistent with Nicky's statement that 'I just felt that the church lets people walk away too easily'. This suggests that churches must develop a much more proactive approach to those who have stopped attending and make contact, if not to persuade them to return, at least to give them a message that they still matter and the door is still open for their return. Whatever complex combination of factors which may lead to an individual leaving church, whether or not they give up on their faith, it is important that churches make reasonable efforts to demonstrate that their spiritual home is still accessible and not so far away. Some may be *departed* and gone for good, but others who have just *drifted* may be easier to reconnect than some might believe.

2. *Disjointed or developed?*

Support and resource families to nurture transactional and intentional faith.

There is clear evidence that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has moved away from its roots as being a church whose faith is passed on and developed primarily within the home. Despite the high levels of Christian profession among the sample, less than 20% of respondents said faith was 'part of everyday family life' growing up, and regular discussion about faith was even more rare.

If few Christian families now consistently and intentionally build faith in their children and young people, it is important to find ways to positively support and resource families so that their experience is less *disjointed* and more *developed*. Despite the patterns of overall decline in family faith practice, there does appear to be an association between the influence of helpful parents and the attendance and faith of their children. As a covenant church, there is an urgent need to find more effective ways to resource and encourage Christian families in their primary task of nurturing faith in their children and young people and from the evidence of this research, there are at least three helpful ways to do this.

- *Equip and encourage Christian parents to clearly and **confidently live out** their faith, modelling faith to their children with integrity through of strong **nurturing relationships**.*

There was evidence for the positive influence on young people by those parents whose faith was both particularly strong and intentionally and consistently lived out. Active Christians in this research were significantly more likely to describe their current relationship with their mother as 'very close' and there was a very clear connection between those who now attend church weekly with having a father who attended church regularly and was actively involved. However, the reverse was also true in respondents and interviewees who referred to parents' faith as uncertain, inconsistent or simply 'private'. Amy, like several others, expressed regret about inconsistent spiritual nurture in her family; 'My dad I always question, he always read me Bible stories when I was wee and sent me to church but he very rarely goes to church'. Such an experience is unhelpful to young people in their own faith development and engagement with church.

Bader and Desmond (2006) found that a key influence of parents on the religiosity of adolescents was when there is a consistency between their attitudes and behaviours. When parents give mixed messages to their children due to inconsistencies between beliefs and actions, there tends to be a decreased effect on religious transmission.

The church's response to this may well need to start with the way that mature faith is developed in adults within our churches, and parents in particular; if parents are unclear or unconfident about their own faith, it will be difficult to lead their children. However, the implications of this area are a matter for further research. It would be beneficial if there was teaching from the pulpit and through accessible literature which encourage parents to be intentional about the way they live out their faith. A key to this is firstly the education of Christian parents so they have a foundational role of faith development with their children and that this is not the responsibility of the church.

The importance of having a strong relational bond between parents and children into their emerging adulthood is also important to acknowledge, especially the bond with mothers. This implies that it would be valuable for nurturing faith to encourage and support parents simply to work hard at maintaining quality relationships with their children right into adulthood.

- *Equip and encourage Christian families to develop **faith practices**, engage consistently together in Sunday worship, discuss faith and develop family worship at **home***

Although 21st century parents are negotiating very different daily social and cultural hurdles compared to their 17th century counterparts, the values and principles of the denomination must find equivalent contemporary forms of expression in the Christian home. Patterns of family life, dining and activity have changed rapidly in more recent years and parents may find it difficult to contemplate the idea of incorporating family worship into an already busy schedule, and be more likely to be happy to leave such responsibilities to Sunday school teachers and youth leaders. Only a quarter heard faith discussed in the home more than occasionally and even prayer at mealtimes and bedtime was experienced by a small minority.

Helen saw her family as perhaps the biggest impediment to her faith; 'I've never heard mummy or daddy pray and it is a thorn in my side because I feel I have missed out...' It is interesting to note how she believed she should nurture faith be in her children: 'when it is me and I have children I think it is my responsibility to teach them - I want to teach them to pray'.

The key therefore is to not just persuade Christian parents of the validity and importance of this role, but demonstrate that there are accessible and achievable practices which will make a difference without necessitating wholesale change to family routines.

Wilson (1989) examined the Judeo-Christian foundations found in the Old Testament, finding that traditions and values were a strong factor in the endurance of the Jewish faith and should provide encouragement to passing on Christian faith. He points out that when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews scattered into exile the rabbis began to refer to the home as a *miqdash me'at* or a 'small sanctuary' or 'miniature temple' (Wilson 1989, p.214). The Jews taught that the home should be set apart for worship, learning the law and serving the community and so the dinner table became the altar of the temple (Wilson 1989, p.215)

'Here is the origin of the family altar. Eating was to be more than a physical function; it was to be a spiritual instrument of religious service. Seen as an altar, the table was to be consecrated. It was to be a place where more than food was to be passed; it was

also to be set apart, that words of Torah might be exchanged. For one 'does not live on bread alone' (Deut. 8:2; c.f. Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4) (Wilson 1989, p.214)

He suggests that the Church could learn a lot from this about the holiness of the home and advocates mirroring the Jewish practice of the 'family altar'. Although the practice of eating dinner around a table may itself be a dying practice, this may be a place to start, even on a weekly basis for today's Christian family within the Presbyterian context in Northern Ireland. Low key and accessible practices are also required, and Powell and Clark's book, *'Sticky Faith: everyday ideas to build lasting faith in your kids'* (2009) is a very practical response to the need to encourage faith in young people vulnerable to drifting from faith and church. Based on extensive research into those transitioning into college, they encourage Christian parents to develop positive practices at home but, like Wilson, to root this in the intergenerational context of the wider church family. They acknowledge that most parents do not talk about faith to their children and teenagers, but that those who do, and who do so meaningfully and not avoiding difficult topics and even the expression of doubts from their children, are more likely to see 'sticky faith' developed in their offspring. They even suggest ideas for making intentional faith conversations part of a ritual activity in homes and other ways to serve and practice faith together as a family.

Another piece of supportive literature which advocates the importance of family faith practice within the context of wider intergenerational faith community is Sisemore's examination of covenantal practice (2000). He argues that Christian parents should have a goal 'to raise children through guidance and disciple to faith in Christ, so that they glorify him in every area of their lives, eventually passing the faith on to their children' (Sisemore 2000, p.73). He goes on to explain how this can be done in an everyday way through how parents cultivate relationships and model Biblical values in their marriage and interaction with others. Sisemore also advocates family prayer, worship and teaching children in the home.

The desire to equip parents to encourage faith in their children therefore does not suggest the need for proscriptive or burdensome expectations on Christian parents, but, in contrast, giving easy access to non-threatening resources and ideas for family worship. The 'Faith at Home' material (Holman 2007) is a good example of this, but may not be an ideal starting point as it is fairly comprehensive. Churches wanting to begin to address this with parents may chose to start with simple ideas included in sermons, church magazines or book stalls which parents can try out without a sense of heavy expectation. Small steps will be an encouragement to further good practice, but the key is to enable parents to see that it is achievable and desirable.

- *Recognise the potential influence of wider family, especially **grandmothers***

Finally, the frequent reference of the importance of wider family by respondents in the research suggests it would be beneficial to explore the role of the extended birth family. Helen explained ‘I never remember mummy or daddy reading to us or praying with us but I do remember granny and granda doing it. I remember staying at granda’s house and every night after the news, half ten, granda and granny both got down on their knees, granny read ...the Bible and then the both of them prayed ...”you get down on your knees and you pray”’.

In particular, the role of grandmothers was prominent, with a third of respondents identifying their grandmother as being a significant influence on faith, and this more likely for SACs than LACs. It could be that encouraging ‘godly grannies’ to embrace the role of supporting their children and grandchildren in encouraging faith would be fruitful. This could involve a range of practical actions, from praying for their grandchildren to helping to provide an environment for faith conversations.

3. *Divided or descended?*

Encourage churches to reframe themselves as intergenerational faith communities.

Following directly from discussion on the influence of family, there is a much evidence of the impact of intentional, relational intergeneration faith community, which is central to the understanding of covenant community. This, by definition, focuses on the relationships which young people are able to develop with others in church and the way in which these encourage faith and engagement in church. Rather than feeling *divided* from the main church family by the way in which youth ministry and church is organised, young people need to experience a sense of being *descended* from a family of faith. From the results of this research the following specific aspects are particularly important to keeping emerging adults close to church.

- *Train and equip **volunteer** leaders to understand the importance of their influence as they engage intentionally with young people*

It was clear from the results that those who were most impacted by adults in the church were most likely to describe those adults as ‘very helpful’, suggesting that those connections which are particularly meaningful are most important. The impact of godly leaders who invest in young people was twice as likely to be described as ‘very helpful’ by SACs than by LACs. Amy described the influence of an older lady who taught Sunday School who ‘was always so joyous and asking how I am and even now to this day she is in her 80’s she is still asking me how I am’,

and Andy spoke of his appreciation of his former BB captain 'just a real role model and seemed so passionate about what he was doing...'.

It is therefore important to ensure that volunteer leaders understand the vital role of relationship and the need to deliberately invest in the young people with whom they are in contact, rather than simply see their role more functionally. It is also important to ensure organisations and general church life provide sufficient time and an environment conducive to the growth of such relationships, rather than being programme driven and goal orientated. This requires a change of culture in churches where youth ministry currently is viewed as the organisations only, but changes can be brought in gradually by small steps such as reducing programmed time and ongoing training of leaders.

- *Promote the value of paid **youth workers** to the long-term faith development of young people either by investing directly in young people or facilitating the development of strong nurturing relationships with other adults.*

Where respondents had attended churches with a paid youth worker, these specialist staff had a significant impact on their long-term faith and involvement when they were described as being 'very helpful' during their teenage years. No youth worker can develop significant relationships with all their young people; even when they have relatively few, some young people will naturally relate better to certain personalities and not find the youth worker the ideal person. However, churches should encourage staff to invest in some as appropriate and encourage leaders and other adults of mature faith to invest in the others.

- *Help people of all ages to more fully understand their covenant responsibilities and their ability to impact young people by developing **meaningful relationships** with them and seeking to develop their faith; equip churches to create the kind of environment where this happens more naturally in the context of an **intergenerational church family**.*

It is particularly striking to see the influence of other adults in the church; stronger Christians (SACs) were four times more likely to find these adults 'very helpful' to their faith, compared to other respondents. Remarkably, almost half of SACs said they very regularly were able to come together with adults of different ages to get to know one another, compared to only 14% of LACs. As one respondent put it, 'Having relationships with people in the church of all ages has kept me involved in church life. (My church) is like a family and people notice when you are not at church which makes you feel valued'.

From this evidence there is no doubt about the need to reframe all that is done in churches with children and young people so that it is firmly placed in a covenantal church family context. Youth ministry can no longer be allowed to happen in its own small corner, rather each child and young person must know they matter as an individual to a church family which cares for and nurtures faith in them.

'No one is strong enough to make it through alone. Everyone needs support. The Jewish concept of the family reminds us of this scriptural value so pertinent for the health and strength of today's Church and home' (Wilson 1989, p.211)

In many ways this is at the heart of the concept of covenant community and the need to establish a relational environment in which young people are embraced, nurtured and encouraged in faith. Wilson (1989) argues from the Old Testament that family means much more than nuclear family but must be seen in the larger community of faith where traditions and values are passed on as faith is passed on; *'Only when the Church and home are seen as people - a community of priests ministering to God and to one another - will they fulfil their God-intended function'* (217).

Clarke & Powell (2011) advocate intentionally developing 'sticky webs' of relationships for young people in church, such as a ratio of 5:1 where each young person has 5 adults who know them and invest in them, or a group of 5 families who meet together for mutual support and attend milestone events of each other's children. They also promote creating events within church which create intergenerational connections and, by forward planning 'can capitalize on momentum from existing events instead of starting from scratch' (2011, p.113).

The relationships which young people develop in church need to be varied due to the mobile and busy nature of today's culture, including strong peer relationships as well as leaders and adults of mature faith. This is core to the idea of 'sacred umbrellas' where young people need a relational support structure which moves with them but points them to their faith home. For example, in at least one congregation in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland the Clerk of Session meets on a regular basis to study the Bible with students who attend university in another part of the country. Other churches send their youth worker to visit students studying in G.B. to encourage them and provide pastoral care, or provide students studying away from home with prayer partners from their home church. It is important for young people and emerging adults to have a number of supportive relationships for different times and places in life.

Martinson et al 'Spirit & Culture of Youth Ministry' (2011) identify the common practices of congregations where spiritual growth is common among teenagers namely when they are

deeply steeped in Biblical narrative, but there is also room for their 'own story'. In Martinson's earlier work, 'Across the Generations', (2001) he identifies importance of intergenerational relationships in churches and gives a range of practice examples. The responsibility is that of everyone, not just youth leaders, parents and elders. Sisemore advocates encouraging members of the congregation to pray for their children and young people (2008, p.174).

Sawler (2011) has published research which emphasises the power of family and generational ministry and he bluntly states his belief that generational ministry, (that is, ministry specifically to children, youth and young adults), has been 'a colossal failure': 'Generational ministry is not ever meant to be a programme of the church. It is to be a *mission* of the church!' (2011, p.21). Instead, Sawler talks about the need for churches to open up and 'adopt' the next generation so that they are very much involved in the lives of adults in the church; he warns 'It may sound incredibly simplistic but if we do not adopt the next generation, they will not stay. It is a sign that we have not truly welcomed them to be a part of our churches. It is also a sign that we have become self-serving institutions' (2011, p.78). Churches must therefore find ways to allow meaningful relationships between their adult members and the young people and emerging adults in the church. This will mean looking carefully at the way the whole church is organised and oriented, rather than simply the youth ministry, and though this may be costly, but the price of continuing to lose this generation is much greater.

4. *Diverted or doctrinal?*

Re-imagine the role of sacrament and doctrine.

A clear pattern in this research is that most respondents and interviewees did not have a developed understanding of the importance of doctrine and sacrament, which is at the heart of faith in the covenant theology of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Respondents showed ambivalence about communicant membership, although SACs valued communicant membership somewhat more than LACs. Laura showed that, although a strong Christian who values the act of taking communion, she was indifferent about her church membership: 'I don't think it makes a difference; the only difference it makes is you take communion'.

Such attitudes applied to baptism too, where 53% of SACs thought being baptised was very important compared to 30% of LACs. Neil was also a committed Christian who did not seem to think that his infant baptism had made any difference. 'I find it difficult to do the baby thing because there is no difference between me and all the people I know baptised as an infant, like my brother – but they have no knowledge, no interest in God'.

It was particularly striking that two thirds of the sample did not consider it important to attend a specifically Presbyterian church; this was more marked in Urban churches where only 14% thought it was important. As Emma put it: 'I was always brought up: 'it doesn't matter which church you go to' they're all the same'. Helen was more direct: 'I don't want to be known as Helen the Presbyterian, I want to be known as Helen the Christian'. While there could be considered to be very positive elements to that statement, it is evident that even the strongest Christians are unlikely to value of the doctrine and practice which is core to covenant theology.

The concern therefore is not just the loss of many young people from the denomination, the gateway concern of this research; if emerging generations who do stay are unable to carry on the theologically distinct faith of their predecessors, this could lead to the irrevocable loss of the very defining character of the denomination.

There is great potential to re-imagine sacramental practice and help young people better understand the key doctrines of the church, encouraging both personal faith and a greater engagement in corporate faith. This could result in not just greater appreciation of the heart of reformed doctrine, more thriving faith development and closer long-term ties to the church, but protection of the long-term distinctiveness of the denomination itself.

There are at least three ways to can practically address these challenges, focusing on theological understanding, sacramental practice, and theological education:

- *Help young people, and the wider church, to understand, value and articulate their **baptism and communicant membership**, helping to forge a strong sense of **identity and belonging**.*

Theology which is clearly taught and understood is vital in this area. Sisemore points out that churches' theological understanding of the role of baptism has very important implications for how they will then see their children, especially those who were baptised as infants; 'covenant theology considers (baptised children) to be members of the covenant community and participants in its blessings, but not fully so until they demonstrate faith and are admitted to the Lord's table' (2008, p.140, parenthesis mine). This means that Presbyterian churches, with their basis in covenant theology, ought to see baptised children as part of the visible church to be treated as members and heirs to the promise of faith, so that their baptism has a very great significance to both their identity and sense of belonging to the church. 'An integral part of who we are. They are not outsiders, but a part of the church family as much as of our own. They are not to be overlooked or shoved to the periphery. They are part of God's kingdom and recipients of his blessing' (Sisemore 2008, p.143).

There was little sense that many of the respondents or interviewees understood much of this theology of baptism and belonging, even though most were communicant members. This is an important not just to keep them within the denomination but to their effective Christian nurture, because it misses an important opportunity to solidify young people's sense of identity and belonging within the wider church. 'Like the covenant itself, baptism implies blessing and curses. For those covenant children who combine the hearing of the Gospel with faith (see Heb 4:2), baptism is a great comfort in times of doubt and fear' (Horton 1995, p.16).

It is also interesting to consider how the ministers, elders, parents and members of congregation understand the place of children and young people and the sacraments; if there is a poor theology in this regard, it would be understandable that young people would also have an incomplete understanding, but that question was not examined in this research.

Mikoski (2009) argues that deep Christian identity can be nurtured effectively when the sacrament of baptism is practiced and held closely with the doctrine of Trinity and Christian formation. He shows how baptism can be the starting point for a strong Christian identity, belonging and even purpose or conviction in life. Firstly in terms of identity, even an infant being baptised is being conferred a clear identity in Christ and as one 'engaged to be the Lord's'; as Mikoski puts it, 'the baptised receive both uniqueness and connection with others in the baptismal rite. Baptism confers Christian identity and provides a basis for deepening that identity in the communal context of the church' (2009, p.34).

- *Create an environment where young people's faith development will thrive as part of the community of all ages, wherein **sacraments are practiced** in a manner which helps the church rediscover their **central importance** to the benefit of all.*

In the PCI tradition, despite some departure from this practice at times in its history, (Holmes 2006), infant baptism always occurs in the context of public worship where, in addition to parents' vows, the congregation takes vows to order their congregational life to 'continuously surround' the child with Christian witness and care as they grow up. This is a clear affirmation of the belonging which is conferred on the child from the moment of their baptism, but it is unknown how many Presbyterians fully understand the implications when they take that vow and there is very little evidence that the potential benefits of this have been fully realised. This is a communal act in the heart of a community and there must be potential to re-imagine the ways in which sacraments are practiced to maximise their potential to encourage a Christian identity in young people, solidly grounded as part of a community of believers of all ages.

'To what extent in our era of individualistic Christianity is there this sense of mutual responsibility? This solemn sacrament draws the community together in a bond of duty – yes, duty, the word that has become so repugnant to our entitlement society. If we really made those promises in good faith, as parents or as a parish, it means that we will make certain that there are regular periods of instruction for our children at home and in the church, It requires us to treat them as a heritage of the Lord, not as consumers to be entertained to death in youth groups, as they are themselves going to pass on this heritage down to their children' (Horton 1995, p.17)

If Communion is to take on a greater significance to young people and they are to better understand their status in the period 'between' the two sacraments, (i.e. their baptism as an infant and their first communion), then the practice must be addressed of some churches who exclude all non-communicant children and young people from communion services,. Communion is a very visual symbolic sacrament which serves as a sign of grace, and they should become familiar with it long before they first take communion; but they must also understand the meaning of it in order to be fully ready to take it.

Sisemore, (2008), argues that children's involvement in worship and the sacraments is vital to their faith in the covenantal context as they should be treated as members of the community of faith. When it comes to participation in services of communion, this participation and presence is more contested and problematic. As outlined earlier, the Doctrine Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland did not define an age from which children and young people should be allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper, though they made some useful suggestions of ways to demystify the sacrament and help children to understand what was involved. The indifference to communicant membership shown by respondents and interviewees in this research suggests the need for a major review of practice in this area.

Arthur writes in Thompson's book on the future of the United Methodist Church in USA on 'Reclaiming the Art of Confirmation', proposing the development of 'excellent, intentionally formative, deeply enculturating confirmation' (2011, p.102), a term and programme which is common in USA and Anglican Church of Ireland but not in the Irish Presbyterian context. Arthur identifies young people's separation from sacraments and describes how, in the process of young people become cut off 'from the very practices and people that could help them grow and mature in faith, many find themselves alienated from "big church" when it comes time to graduate out of youth group' (2011, p.101). Arthur describes confirmation as a 'reaffirmation of baptism' (2011, p.102) and advocates clear and intentional practices which are useful in spiritual formation as well as assisting young people in their understanding of sacrament. These practices include developing powerful rituals and increasing young people's participation in worship, but Arthur also argues for setting clear expectations for young people in the confirmation process and helping parents and adult mentors to play a full part in the

process. Arthur concludes her argument by connecting the sacraments of baptism and communion to young people's spiritual development and their place in church. In response to the question of whether today's youth will be tomorrow's church she says, 'My answer is YES. Because today's youth are *today's* church. By virtue of their baptisms, youth are full members in the body of Christ, empowered to serve and to lead *right now*' (Arthur 2011, p.109).

It is necessary to thoroughly review the process of coming to the Lords table for the first time within the denomination; this is for those young people in areas where the many of young people come due to pressure from parents and the majority of these then stop attending, and those in areas where becoming a communicant member has little attraction. In every case, it is because young people attach a low value to becoming a communicant member, if not to communion itself, that the full value and impact of the sacrament is not experienced. This may, for instance, involve consideration of a process similar to the confirmation of other denominations, whereby young people are given significant opportunity to consider the background, purpose and meaning of sacraments in their faith and church fellowship. It could also involve longer periods of confirmation instruction or residential weekends or camps.

For young people to be unenthusiastic about sacraments is something of an ironic tragedy for a church which claims to have these at the very core of its identity and yet is seeing these young people become disconnected in rapidly increasing numbers. The value of sacraments for encouraging faith and building community is described articulately by Charry: 'Sacraments recall God's promises and presence to the worshipping community, binding it together ever more tightly and to clearer purpose' (1995, p.1077). Charry describes infant baptism as when children are 'glued to the maker of heaven and earth by the Holy Spirit' and communion as a time that 'Christians are bound together by feasting at the Lord's table' (1995, p.1078). This is significant to considerations of how to develop faith in young people and a sense of greater involvement in church for the long haul; 'Christians who are bound together sacramentally understand that they are responsible for one another'. This means that not only is the experience and practice of this theology important, but the way young people are taught about the fundamental building blocks of faith matters greatly also, which leads to the third implication of these findings in relation to sacrament and doctrine.

- *Develop creative and engaging ways to teach key **doctrine** to young people so that they understand more about their faith within our reformed, **covenantal** context.*

Whereas the importance of engaging young people meaningfully in the tangible sacraments at the heart of Presbyterianism, it is also important to assist them to have insight into the

theological reasons why they are important and other key doctrinal issues in the denomination. The distinctiveness of Presbyterianism was important to very few respondents and, while this may be for many positive reasons such as a desire to avoid the divisiveness of denominationalism, it also means that young people may miss out on imbibing some of the vital theology which will help their faith and church connection endure.

Having acknowledged the importance of *agency* and *structure* in helping young people to achieve their *faith capital*, and examined the vital nature of relational, intergenerational community for their faith development, it is reasonable that learning doctrine will happen best in that same context. Although it was not a specific question in this research, informal evidence suggests the traditional use of catechism in the denomination has greatly declined, and Osmer points out the consequences of this in relation to young people who leave their churches; 'Somewhere along the line the church failed these people. It failed to provide them with the intellectual and spiritual resources needed in a postmodern world' (Osmer 1997, p.408). Therefore, in light of this research, the challenge is to meet the need to provide such resources in a new way but a manner appropriate to the essence of Presbyterianism.

Vgotsky developed a psychological theoretical standpoint which proposes that learning is best achieved when 'scaffolding' is provided as the relational context to assist learning. His concept of the Zone of Proximal Development describes how to identify the difference between what a learner can do with or without help and providing both appropriate and optimum conditions for learning. 'The underlying assumption behind the concept is that psychological development and instruction are socially embedded; to understand them one must analyze the surrounding society and its social relations' (Hedegaard 2005, p.223). The Zone of Proximal Development is defined by what a child or young person can do independently and what they can do with adult help and describes their optimum place of learning.

These are useful concepts to assist understanding of how an intergenerational faith community can assist a young people to optimum faith development. In order to understand how to teach children and young people the key concepts of the faith, it would be advantageous to work out a similar Proximal Zone for their development of theological understanding, and to acknowledge the vital importance of various adults in helping them to maximize learning in this. 'Scaffolding' is a flexible term used to describe a range of adult actions aimed to ensure that children and young people achieve learning goals, without which the learning would be unachievable (Schaffer 1996:270). This raises the question of what such scaffolding and social interaction would be like in the context of instruction on faith.

Bender helpfully describes how children learn language from their parents, 'echoing' words that they hear repeatedly and using them to form language for themselves. 'To catechize means to speak a word that both creates faith and becomes the Christian's own word in confession and prayer' (Bender 2001, p.25) Catechism has become synonymous with learning questions and answers by rote, but is a method not known to be useful for understanding or to be familiar to how children learn in the 21st Century. However, a new approach and new definition for catechising would have the potential to transform a situation where many young people in the church have a poor grasp of key doctrine, or even of the reasons why they should know it. Bender's ideas may speak usefully into this as he describes learning the language of faith as being a lifelong process which happens primarily in family, but equally it can be argued, in the community of faith. 'Catechesis is the passing on of the language of our holy faith, God's own Word, that we might be led to embrace Christ by faith in every time, place, circumstance and need of our lives' (Bender 2001, p.27). It is a big leap for most to reframe the notion of teaching questions and answers in a Sunday school class to teaching a language of faith in home and church family, but this is a journey which appears to be vital.

'Catechesis, like a child in the home under the tutelage of father and mother, involves 'the doing' of those things which will continue to be part of the Christian's life after Baptism: attending worship, confessing sin, hearing preaching, receiving the Lord's Supper, and living in one's calling.' (Bender 2001, p.27)

If learning by rote is not an effective method for today's young people, there is still a need to understand the kind of vocabulary they do need for the world in which they are called to live out their faith. Osmer perceptively identified both that identity development is now a key task for young people, and that the increasing cultural pluralism which young Christians face means they need to be able to understand and articulate their faith if it is to remain their own. 'There is no reason that the internalization approaches of humanistic education cannot be replaced by forms of teaching consistent with the best contemporary research on human development and learning' (Osmer 1997, p.411). It is beyond the remit of this thesis to try to define detailed practice of doctrinal and theological instruction in response to the apparent weaknesses which have been revealed, but the need for PCI to reverse the trend urgently is undeniable; 'If churches and homes will not catechise the next generation, it will not happen at the YMCA or Boy Scouts, much less at the arcade machines or the mall' (Horton 2001, p.23)

The last word in this section goes to Horton's comment, which was written almost 20 years ago and may be even more true today; 'a great deal of our present crisis in the church is due to our own laziness, the pace of our worldly lives, and the failure of nerve in taking seriously this divine mandate to build dynasties of faith' (Horton 1995, p17).

5. *Discounted or developed?*

Strategically facilitate youth participation in all of church life.

The place of teenagers and emerging adults in the church also requires a practical theological response. Although those in this research had some opportunity to play an active part in their own programmes as teenagers, many feel *discounted* due to more limited opportunity within the wider church and opportunities increased very little when they turned 18 years old.

Evidence demonstrates the importance of engaging young people in the life, service and decision-making of congregations, not only helping them to feel *developed*, connected and invested in the faith community, but also a benefit to the wider church itself. SACs were much more likely than LACs to have a lot of opportunity to participate and serve in wider church life, and the same pattern was repeated in relation to having a voice or to influence decisions in their church. As one respondent put it 'Now I feel I am able to be more vocal and my opinions, though not always wise, are listened to and respected.' This is an essential part of discipleship because it is at the heart of what it means to express faith practically and be an active member of the faith community.

The importance of youth participation may be at least as great as the previous issues as it signifies the effective outworking of the faith forming work of families, church community, sacrament and catechesis in enabling young people to take a real part in church. The key is that faith development in young people by parents and church and their involvement in sacrament and communicant membership should have the purpose of enabling them to work out their faith through service in the congregation and the world outside, rather than simply being present. Some practical ways to achieve this includes at least the following:

- *Encourage a culture where young people have opportunities to **meaningfully participate** in their programmes and the life, service and witness of the whole congregation.*

Sumpter asks the pertinent question 'are we, as reformational Christians, ready to embrace the biblical and theological principle that baptized children and youth help make up today's church and not merely tomorrow's church?' (2003, p.31). He advocates modelling service to young people and enable them to serve alongside adults, such as an elder taking his son to do a hospital visit, or an entire family serving in the community. Sumpter also acknowledges that children and young people may have a lot to offer in leading adults; 'Will we humble ourselves and serve among our children and youth so that they might effectively and faithfully lead us?' (2003, p.32).

It was clear from those who participated in this study, and whose faith was strong, that they did not want to be passive members of a church, in fact their opportunity to be active was valued by them more than desiring formal membership. This may require churches to take brave steps in trusting their young people to do things which may lead to changes and risk that they may make, and learn from, mistakes. It is important, as outlined earlier, that participation is on the basis that young people are supported and mentored in their active service so that they do not feel vulnerable. In relation to the Zone of Proximal Development, this is an active opportunity for young people to grow in their faith as they participate and serve. One respondent put it this way: 'everyone has a role to play in the church and if that role is not catered for then they might stray off and could possibly backslide in their faith'.

- *Develop mechanisms to enable young people to have a **meaningful voice** in their churches.*

Perhaps more challenging is the question of how to involve young people in the decision-making of congregations. Only a small minority of respondents were able to say they had a voice in their congregations and even within their youth organisations the sense of opportunity to contribute was limited but there was great significance for those who did. This would engage young people and make them feel that they matter and have a valid contribution to make, thus making their long-term involvement more likely. This may seem to carry greater risks for congregations, and even those who are open to enabling young people's participation in congregations may not know where to begin. Young people themselves may not have the experience to feel equipped to have or express opinions. The SPUD Youth Assembly has been developed in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to not only give young people a route into decision making bodies at a denominational level, but to work with congregations and young people at a local level to develop models of participation and opinion-sharing which work well in different contexts. The evidence of this research is that these developments could be very strategically important to the denomination in terms of enabling meaningful active membership of young people and emerging adults. 'Let them have a voice, support them in their vision for evangelism and discipleship, and community. Don't let tradition get in the way but make sure that in your wisdom you teach us how to be holy people of God. Pray for us' (respondent).

6. *Disregarded or disciplined?*

Ensure individual developmental needs of emerging adults are addressed.

There have been strong arguments that the 18-25 year old target group of this research should be seen as a distinct developmental life phase and that the church should respond accordingly.

Additionally, each individual clearly needs to feel they matter and are treated individually. This has implications not only for the faith development of teenagers and emerging adults in the church, but how the church considers those who are no longer engaged.

There were some interesting comments about the needs of emerging adults suggesting they may feel *disregarded*; one respondent said ‘thank you for taking the time to consider how the church can meet the needs of this sometimes seemingly lost age group’. Several comments were made about how often people in this phase of life can be negatively influenced, lose their faith or simply feel out of place in the wider church, and that it was essential to carefully consider their faith and developmental needs to ensure they are effectively *disciplined*. There has been evidence to support the following practical responses:

- *Establish places where young adults can be disciplined and equipped to play their part as identified above and which recognises their unique **developmental needs** & circumstances*

There could be debate about whether emerging adults should be immediately integrated with the adults in the congregation or if they should have their own programmes. The best approach is one which combines these, giving them a space where they can be with peers and consider faith and life issues in their own context, but at the same time encourage them to build bridges to the rest of the congregation. Less than a quarter of respondents attended a programme specifically for 18-25 year olds, but there is a strong association between involvement in such programmes and both faith and regularity of attendance at church. This suggests that the development of programmes for discipling emerging adults is important, but that these should not conflict with the goal of integrating those attending into the wider church and give them opportunities to fully participate and serve there. There were many respondents who expressed support for such provision which would allow them a safe place to explore their faith and receive pastoral care and discipleship in a way which meets their particular and individual needs.

- *Create an environment of which young people and emerging adults can comfortably **feel part** and know that they are cared for by adults of all ages.*

There was a very striking call from both respondents and interviewees to make church a place where they could feel cared for and valued as individuals. Andy studied outside Northern Ireland and highlighted how the church can meet the needs of emerging adults: ‘This is a time in your life whenever there is quite a lot of change going on, for me being at university or other people getting jobs, probably knowing that the congregation is praying for you is one of the

most important things, at times like this I know I want to feel part of the church at home'. A respondent talked about the role of people around 18-25 in supporting younger teenagers but added: 'I feel that the young adults also need support from the older people in the church to do the same for them and encourage us in our faith too. The biggest part of my learning and growth in the faith has been from having fellowship with older believers outside of church and in our normal conversations. If churches had a better community spirit I feel they would know one another better and it would be easier to approach each other if there is ever a problem, the relationships will be built on friendships and we would feel more like a body together.'

Sawler highlights the value of community as a caring context for emerging adults; 'The church is foremost to be a covenant community – or, in other words, a community that is committed to the growth, provision, and care of all its members' (2011, p.11). He points out that if they do not experience meaningful relationships of care, they are likely to leave; this is a fundamental area which emerging adults seek. 'Our goal needs to be to help connect this generation to a place where the church is living as a covenant community' (Sawler 2011, p.15).

This does not have to be complicated or demanding, but each congregation needs to find ways to care for each individual. At the emerging adult stage there has to be the proper balance between providing pastoral care and faith development opportunities without cossetting them in a way which impairs their personal development. It is also important to develop a sense of care for one another within peer communities, and the development of small groups is an ideal way to approach this and the discipleship need mentioned above.

- *Treating each person as an **individual** ensure that the church prioritises **follow up** on those whose connection is loosening or who have stopped attending.*

Returning full circle to where the discussion about practical response began, churches must consider each person as a unique individual and establish mechanisms to follow up on any who drift in their involvement or stop attending. This will never guarantee a return or increased attendance, but no emerging adults should justifiably be able to say, as Nicky and Becca did, that no one had ever tried to get in contact with them. Moreover, this evidence suggests most congregations must work hard to ensure that their church feels like a spiritual home to adolescents and emerging adults, where they feel accepted without judgement and can return without shame, receiving the welcome of a prodigal rather than an outcast. As discussed in chapter 3, this may mean that a change in expectations and approach is required, so churches recognise that some will wander but that this does not mean they have abandoned their faith. It does mean they need to work hard to ensure they can return as easily as possible.

Limitations

Although the objectives of this research have been successful in many ways, there are inevitable limitations. This research would have been more useful if it had been possible to contact more who are no longer involved in church, but this proved very difficult. The quantitative data is insufficient to draw strong conclusions on those who no longer attend, but there the qualitative data gave some good information in this area.

The data is intentionally taken from one denomination which limits the ability to extrapolate to other contexts. However, there are strong advantages in this in terms of specific application to that context. Apart from the useful input from one interviewee, little reference was possible to the growth of independent and fellowship churches and movement away from mainstream denominations but this would be an interesting area of investigation.

There is some uncertainty associated with the methodology's dependence on self-report by respondents, notably their assessment of their own faith and church attendance. The accuracy of these statements is impossible to judge, as respondents might have exaggerated their spiritual strength or been modest in describing their faith. However, it was the most accurate method in the circumstances and there is no indication of inconsistencies within the data.

Areas of further research

The research highlighted a number of other areas which would merit further research. One of the most significant concerns how churches can effectively disciple parents towards mature faith so that they effectively model this at home. It would also be beneficial to understand more about the association between the strength of relationship between Christian parents and their children and the faith and church connection of those children into adulthood.

Related to this are questions around the most effective methods of teaching doctrine effectively to children, young people and adults in the current cultural context. This also concerns theological understandings of sacrament and the place of children young people in churches by church leaders and members of congregations and how this impacts perceptions.

One final area of potential research concerns issues of lifestyle and cognitive dissonance in adolescents and emerging adults. It would be interesting to understand more of their perceptions of how the church views them and their potential to return without judgement by members of the church and if this impacts the individual's likelihood to return to church.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this thesis regarding the place of emerging adults have continuity from the lens of the research, namely the covenantal theology of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. In summary, the practice proposals focus on encouraging faith development in Christian homes and the creation of a deeply caring and meaningfully connected Christian community of all ages where adolescents and emerging adults feel they belong and can play a full part. This will also require urgently addressing young people's doctrinal and sacramental understanding and creating a developmentally appropriate model of ministry to emerging adults. It is also evident that congregations must not make assumptions about those who have stopped attending as they may still have faith or at least be open to respond to invitations to return.

Although this research raises many further questions, there are some clear conclusions. It is insufficient to merely look for new ideas and make cosmetic changes; rather something fundamental is required. Those in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland must look carefully at how and why it has changed from its origins; this 'reformed and reforming' denomination must once again become one which keeps each individual and unique young member secure at the heart of the covenant community of faith. There are no easy or simple solutions but the theological origins of the denomination can be rediscovered, finding 21st Century ways to practice them so children, young people and emerging adults are once again so enfolded in an intergenerational family of faith that they understand their identity and feel secure in the strength of their belonging.

The last word should go to one respondent who wrote about how to keep young people close to home: 'Love them like God loves them, preach the gospel and bring them daily before him in prayer. Trust that the Lord is building his church.'

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Appendix 1 - Tables relating to methodology

Region	Total	Location A-E (urban) / F-H (rural)	Size (using 3 categories) 2 from each cell	Size (using 2 categories) 3 from each cell
NORTH	118	Urban 38	Large 28	Large 33
			Medium 9	
			Small 1	Small 5
		Rural 80	Large 24	Large 41
			Medium 38	
			Small 18	Small 39
EAST	122	Urban 92	Large 53	Large 76
			Medium 33	
			Small 6	Small 16
		Rural 30	Large 12	Large 18
			Medium 12	
			Small 6	Small 12
SOUTH	100	Urban 21	Large 9	Large 12
			Medium 7	
			Small 5	Small 9
		Rural 79	Large 7	Large 17
			Medium 18	
			Small 54	Small 62
WEST	104	Urban 20	Large 10	Large 17
			Medium 10	
			Small 0	Small 3
		Rural 84	Large 5	Large 8
			Medium 22	
			Small 57	Small 76
Total	444		444	444

**Table A1.1 comparative numbers of congregations in each category
if using sample of 2 size categories or 3 size categories of congregation**

% sample	Region				Size		Location		Total #	
	North	East	South	West	Large	Small	Rural	Urban	Congr.	Persons
Sample	27%	27%	23%	23%	50%	50%	61%	39%	48	n/a
Invitations	16%	30%	33%	21%	66%	34%	49%	51%	48	1178
Responses	21.3%	39.4%	18.1%	21.3%	69.1%	30.9%	53.2%	46.8%	34*	98

* 14 congregations had no indicated respondents

Table A1.2 proportions of sample, invitations sent and responses received according to the region, size and location of the subjects

Table A1.3 congregation sample, described by Region, Location and Size
with numbers of invitations sent and questionnaires received (continued overleaf)

Cong. code	Presbytery	Region	Band	Location	# Families	Size	Sent	Ret.	Total
N1	Ballymena	North	H	Rural	184	Large	25	1	9
N2	Templepatrick	North	H	Rural	227	Large	40	6	
N3	Templepatrick	North	H	Rural	319	Large	12	2	
N4	Coleraine	North	H	Rural	160	Small	10	0	1
N5	Coleraine	North	H	Rural	52	Small	14	0	
N6	Templepatrick	North	H	Rural	93	Small	6	1	
N7	Ballymena	North	C	Urban	216	Large	6	0	2
N8	Ballymena	North	C	Urban	726	Large	15	1	
N9	Coleraine	North	C	Urban	439	Large	8	1	
N10	Ballymena	North	C	Urban	155	Small	30	0	8
N11	Carrickfergus	North	A	Urban	102	Small	4	2	
N12	Coleraine	North	C	Urban	159	Small	18	6	
E1	Ards	East	G	Rural	265	Large	36	3	12
E2	Dromore	East	G	Rural	391	Large	20	6	
E3	Dromore	East	H	Rural	402	Large	20	3	
E4	Ards	East	H	Rural	120	Small	6	0	3
E5	Ards	East	H	Rural	163	Small	20	3	
E6	Ards	East	G	Rural	105	Small	6	0	
E7	Belfast East	East	A	Urban	533	Large	157	14	19
E8	Belfast North	East	A	Urban	455	Large	20	2	
E9	Belfast North	East	A	Urban	186	Large	11	3	
E10	Belfast East	East	A	Urban	171	Small	30	1	1
E11	Belfast South	East	A	Urban	141	Small	2	1	
E12	Belfast South	East	A	Urban	150	Small	30	1	

S1	Down	South	F	Rural	655	Large	42	0	
S2	Down	South	H	Rural	569	Large	117	2	
S3	Iveagh	South	H	Rural	469	Large	20	3	5
S4	Armagh	South	H	Rural	7	Small	6	0	
S5	Armagh	South	H	Rural	56	Small	20	3	
S6	Newry	South	H	Rural	42	Small	2	0	3
S7	Down	South	E	Urban	210	Large	10	3	
S8	Down	South	A	Urban	440	Large	30	1	
S9	Newry	South	C	Urban	186	Large	10	0	4
S10	Armagh	South	D	Urban	125	Small	60	2	
S11	Armagh	South	C	Urban	104	Small	22	1	
S12	Armagh	South	D	Urban	92	Small	51	2	5
W1	Coleraine	West	H	Rural	328	Large	40	2	
W2	Derry /Donegal	West	H	Rural	318	Large	19	2	
W3	Tyrone	West	G	Rural	191	Large	56	8	12
W4	Coleraine	West	H	Rural	48	Small	2	0	
W5	Omagh	West	H	Rural	70	Small	31	2	
W6	Omagh	West	H	Rural	33	Small	11	3	5
W7	Coleraine	West	D	Urban	215	Large	4	1	
W8	Derry /Donegal	West	B	Urban	202	Large	4	0	
W9	Derry /Donegal	West	B	Urban	349	Large	60	1	2
W10	Derry /Donegal	West	B	Urban	148	Small	1	0	
W11	Derry /Donegal	West	B	Urban	136	Small	4	0	
W12	Tyrone	West	E	Urban	138	Small	10	1	1
	Not declared							4	4
	TOTAL						1178	98	98

Table A1.3 congregation sample, described by Region, Location and Size
with numbers of invitations sent and questionnaires received (continued)

Appendix 2 - Letters, information sheets and consent forms
relating to the questionnaire and interviews.

Appendix 2.1 – letter to Clerk of Assembly

Dear Dr Watts

As you may be aware, I am currently undertaking a PhD programme with Kings College London and carrying out research on behalf of the Research and Education Committee of the Board of Youth and Children's Ministry of our church. The project is entitled "Keeping Emerging Adults close: a study of the practice of family theology among 18-25 year old Presbyterians in Northern Ireland" and aims to identify the factors which are important in whether or not those in the 18 to 25 age group remain connected with our congregations.

I intend to begin the first phase of my empirical work this summer and hope to be able to contact those in the relevant group from 10% of the congregations in Northern Ireland. The only practical way to do this is through the ministers of each of the congregations which will be chosen as a 10% representative sample.

I would be very grateful if I could have your written permission to approach the ministers of the 48 churches which will be sampled in order to request them to contact those in the 18-25 age group who are connected with their church. I am happy to provide any further information you may require.

Many thanks

Yours

Dear Rev...

I am currently undertaking a PhD programme with Kings College London and carrying out research on behalf of the Research and Education Committee of the Board of Youth and Children's Ministry of our church. The project is entitled "Keeping Emerging Adults close: a study of the practice of family theology among 18-25 year old Presbyterians in Northern Ireland" and aims to identify the factors which are important in influencing whether or not those in the 18 to 25 age group remain connected with our congregations. We are hopeful that this research will help us understand more fully the influence of factors such as family of origin, the influence of practical covenantal theology, the active involvement of young people in their churches and the meeting of particular developmental needs of this age group. It is our aim that this will help inform how the church engages with young people and that this will have a positive impact on the number of 18-25s who remain active in our congregations.

I am beginning the first phase of my empirical work this summer and hope to be able to contact those in the relevant group from 10% of the Presbyterian congregations in Northern Ireland. The only practical way to do this is directly through each of the 48 congregations who have been chosen as a 10% representative sample. Your congregation is one of those which has been selected and I would be very grateful of your help with this very important project.

I would like to send a questionnaire to as many people as possible in the relevant age group who have been associated with your congregation. This is regardless of whether their families are involved in the congregation or whether they themselves are currently actively connected. For selection, the individuals should meet each of the following criteria:

- aged between their 18 and 25 (inclusive) on 30th June 2010;
- have had a previous involvement with your congregation, whether or not they are currently involved;
- have been involved at least once per month approximately, in at least one area of church life, including organisations and Sunday worship;
- have maintained this involvement for at least 1 year at some stage since their 11th birthday;
- may or may not belong to a family with a connection to your congregation.

I know this may require some work and the searching of different data bases or talking to organisation leaders, but I hope you will agree that this is time worth spending. If you are willing to take part and you are able to identify an approximate number of those who fall into this group, I will supply you with the correct number of envelopes, with postage attached if they are not to be hand delivered. Each envelope will contain a letter of introduction, an information sheet about the project, a questionnaire and a stamped addressed return envelope. Each participant will also be asked to indicate if they would be willing to be interviewed at a later date, as I hope to interview a small number to gain some deeper insight into the issues involved.

I or someone in the Youth and Children's Office will contact you by telephone in the next week to discuss this with you further and to ask if you are willing to be involved in the project. If you agree, we will prepare the appropriate number of envelopes which we can send to you, or if it is suitable, perhaps you would be able to collect these from the Youth and Children's Office during the week of General Assembly.

Thank you for reading this letter. I know that what I am asking is not a small favour, but trust that you will share my passion for the aims of this project. If you have any immediate questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 028 9041 **** or via email at graeme@pciyouth.org.

Yours sincerely

Graeme Thompson

Hello

My name is Graeme Thompson and I am Youth Development Office with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Board of Youth and Children's Ministry. I have contacted you through your minister because I am currently undertaking a PhD programme with Kings College London and carrying out research on behalf of the Research and Education Committee of the Board of Youth and Children's Ministry of our church.

The project is entitled "Keeping Emerging Adults close: a study of the practice of family theology among 18-25 year old Presbyterians in Northern Ireland" and aims to identify the factors which are important in influencing whether or not those in the 18 to 25 age group remain connected with our congregations. We are hopeful that this research will help equip the church to better engage with young people and that this will have a positive impact on the number of 18-25s who remain active in our congregations.

I do not know who you are - only your minister knows that you have been given this envelope. No one, not even your minister, will know whether or not you have responded, but I would be very grateful if you would read the enclosed information sheet and consider completing and returning the enclosed questionnaire. It will potentially help the church do a better job in how it engages with teenagers and young adults and I hope you can play a part in that.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at my office by telephone on 028 9041 7251 or via email at graeme@pci youth.org.

Thank you.

Regards

Graeme Thompson

(Youth Development Officer)

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

REC Protocol Number:

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

“Keeping Emerging Adults close: a study of the practice of family theology among 18-25 year olds Presbyterians in Northern Ireland.”

We would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The project is entitled “Keeping Emerging Adults close: a study of the practice of family theology among 18-25 year olds Presbyterians in Northern Ireland” and aims to identify the factors which are important in influencing whether or not those in the 18 to 25 age group remain connected with our congregations. We are hopeful that this research will help equip the church to better engage with young people and that this will have a positive impact on the number of 18-25s who remain active in our congregations.

We want to contact as many people aged 18 to 25 who have been connected with some randomly selected Presbyterian Churches in Northern Ireland. We have written to you through your minister as he or she identified you as someone who has had a connection with their congregation, even if you are not actively involved now. We would like you to complete the enclosed questionnaire which will help us understand your experience of being involved in a Presbyterian church. There is an envelope to return this to us, but you are under no obligation to do so and if you chose not to complete the questionnaire, no one will know you have not done so.

There is also an opportunity to agree to be contacted at a future date for a personal interview. You also do not have to agree to this or give your contact details but can merely complete the questionnaire and choose not to be selected for interview. Your participation in the questionnaire section of the study will not be affected by your decision not to be willing to be interviewed. If you do agree to be interviewed at a later date your contact details will be stored separately from the questionnaire. Please note that only a small number of people will be interviewed and not everyone who agrees to be contacted will hear from us again.

If you complete the questionnaire and return it to us, it is assumed that is you giving your consent for the information to be used. As participation is anonymous, it will not be possible to withdraw your data once the questionnaire has been submitted. Even if you have completed the contact details for the interview, your questionnaire will be separated from this, will be processed and the information stored securely on a computer. No one will be able to identify which data is yours and your questionnaire will be destroyed in one year. The anonymous data will be retained for future use.

If you agree to be interviewed and send your contact details, this data will be kept separately and securely and will only be used if you are selected for interview. Once the interviews have all been completed this contact information will be deleted, whether or not you were interviewed. Only I and my administrative assistant will have access to this contact information and the data from your questionnaire.

At the end of the project, a summary of the findings will be made available on the web site of the Youth and Children's Board, www.pciyac.org and you will have an opportunity to comment on it there. It is not yet known when this will be complete.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at the Youth and Children's Office by telephone on 028 9041 7251 or via email at graeme@pci youth.org. If this study has harmed you in any way or caused you any distress you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information: Dr Philip Barnes, Department of Education and Professional Studies, King's College London, University of London, Franklin Wilkins Building, Waterloo Road, London SE1 9NN. Tel: 020 7848 3143 Email: philip.barnes@kcl.ac.uk.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

REC Protocol Number:

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

“Keeping Emerging Adults close: a study of the practice of family theology among 18-25 year olds Presbyterians in Northern Ireland.”

Thank you for taking part in this postgraduate research project by submitting a completed questionnaire and agreeing for us to contact you requesting an interview. You should only participate in this interview if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The project is entitled “Keeping Emerging Adults close: a study of the practice of family theology among 18-25 year olds Presbyterians in Northern Ireland” and aims to identify the factors which are important in influencing whether or not those in the 18 to 25 age group remain connected with our congregations. We are hopeful that this research will help equip the church to better engage with young people and that this will have a positive impact on the number of 18-25s who remain active in our congregations.

We contacted a number of people aged 18 to 25 who have been connected with Presbyterian Churches in Northern Ireland and asked them to complete a questionnaire to help us understand their experience of being involved in a Presbyterian church. We have analysed these questionnaires and want to discuss the findings with a small number of those who completed them and to find out more detail about their experiences. I would like to ask you about some of the results we obtained from the questionnaires and also about your own experiences including the importance of your family in your faith, your experience of the people in your church, how involved you were there and how much you believe the church took account of your needs. You do not have to answer any of the questions I ask and can stop the interview at any point without giving a reason. The interview will probably last around 60 but will be no longer than 90 minutes.

Anything you say in interview will be confidential and will not be able to be used to identify you at any stage. Although your confidentiality shall be kept at all times, there are certain cases where researchers cannot protect it. In relation to children, should the researchers have any concerns regarding the safety or well-being of a child, they have a duty under the Children Order (NI) 1995 to report their concerns to a relevant authority (i.e. NSPCC). Where there is sufficient evidence to suggest the endangerment of an adult or child, researchers have a moral obligation to inform an appropriate third party. Both these cases apply if this information refers to something which happened in the past.

Once this interview has been completed your contact information will be deleted. Only I and my administrative assistant have had access to this contact information and the data from your questionnaire. Your interview will be recorded and transcribed by my administrative

assistant who will not know your identity. All information given by you, including names and places, will be changed so that no one will be able to identify them or you from this. The audio recording will be deleted after transcription but that the anonymous transcription will be retained for future use.

There is a form which asks you for your written permission and you will be asked to sign this just before the interview. You have the right to withdraw your data from this study at any time up until May 2011, with no requirement to give notice or an explanation; after this date the information will not be able to be extracted from the study. You can withdraw either by contacting me through my contact details below) or through my supervisor Dr Philip Barnes.

At the end of the project, a summary of the findings will be made available on the web site of the Youth and Children's Board, www.pciyac.org and you will have an opportunity to comment on it there. It is not yet known when this will be complete.

If you have any questions or concerns at any stage, please contact me at the Youth and Children's Office by telephone on 028 9041 7251 or via email at graeme@pci youth.org.

If this study has harmed you in any way or caused you any distress, or if you want to withdraw from the project, you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information: Dr Philip Barnes, Department of Education and Professional Studies, King's College London, University of London, Franklin Wilkins Building, Waterloo Road, London SE1 9NN. Tel: 020 7848 3143 Email: philip.barnes@kcl.ac.uk.

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: “Keeping Emerging Adults close: a study of the practice of family theology among 18-25 year olds Presbyterians in Northern Ireland.”

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: _____

- Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organizing the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part.
- If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.
- The information you have submitted will be published as a report which will be available on the web site of the Youth and Children's Board, www.pciyac.org. Please note that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify you from any publications.
- *I agree that the research team may use my anonymous data for future research.*
- *I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the point up until May 2011*
- *I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.*

Participant's Statement:

I _____

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Appendix 3 - Questionnaire and Interview Schedule

Appendix 3.1 - Questionnaire

Appendix 3.2 - Interview Schedule

Background (5 minutes)

- Tell me a little about yourself: age, qualifications, what you do with yourself? Anything else you think is important to say about yourself?
- Do you currently still live at home? Have you ever lived away from home?
- And are you currently involved in a church?
 - is it PCI / "Contact Church"
 - when were you first involved in your CC (if not here, where did you grow up?)
 - in what activities / organisations were you involved in church as child / teen?

Faith (10)

- How often do you attend church services currently?
- How much are you involved in church, both locally and in wider?
- In your experience, what do you think makes the biggest difference to whether a young person stays involved in a church or retain their faith?
- Are you a Communicant member of your church? How important is that to you? Why?
- Were you baptised as a baby? (Or as an adult?) How important is that to you? Why?
- What does being a Presbyterian mean to you? How important is it to you?
- How would you describe your faith currently?

Church influence (10)

- Who in your church was most supportive and influential to your faith as you grew up?
What did they do which made the biggest difference?
- What else helped you most in your faith?
- What about your organisations and programmes was most useful? And least useful?
- Is there anywhere you got the chance to discuss faith in a helpful way?
- Did you get much chance to mix with older Christians? What difference did this make to you and your faith?

Family influence (10)

- Were your parents involved in church when you were a child or teenager?
- How would you describe their faith then? How did they express it?
- 99What difference, if any, did your parents make to your faith growing up?

- What ways did faith express itself in your family home? Were there any ways it made a difference to your faith?
- How would you describe your parent's faith now? What difference to they make to your faith now?
- Did anyone else in your wider family play an important role?

Participation (10)

- Where did you most feel part of church growing up?
- How much opportunity did you have for your voice to be heard and to influence decisions?
- And now – is your voice heard and can you influence decisions in your church?
- What can churches do to enable young people to play a more active part?

Support (5-10)

- Do you describe yourself as an adult? Why / why not?
- How would you describe who you are, your beliefs, where your life is going?
- Are there any activities in your church specifically aimed at people your age (or 18-25s generally)? What are they? If so, are you involved in those? Why or why not?
- What do you think people your age need from the church? How can they be best supported in their faith?

Summary / conclusion (5-10)

- As you reflect on your experience of church and faith, what do you think has been the most significant positive impact on your faith and church involvement?
- What do you think, in contrast, has been the biggest negative influences on your faith and church involvement?
- What do you think will be most important for your faith development in the future?
- Have you any other comments about the survey or anything else you would like to say about how churches can better enable yp to stay connected and be supported in their faith?

Appendix 4 - Feedback from interview pilots

Appendix 4 - Survey pilot feedback

EM

TIME: about 25 minutes - longest time I've ever taken to do a questionnaire but it didn't drag or didn't make me lose concentration so I think the length is fine.

UNDERSTANDABILITY – 9/10

A few questions I had to reread however that could very well have been me being a little silly, the i.e. not with parent or both parents it was mainly that can't remember the number of the question it was about living away from home etc. How that would be changed I'm not quite sure, but see how other people view it, it might just be me :)

- **17 & 18** - may be better the other way around because I did have to double check what it was asking, it was almost going back if you know what I mean, and I think could easily cause confusion or misleading info due to people not reading it fully and expecting it to say something else like I did until I reread.
- **33** for myself it wasn't family who really influenced me but was more friends and youth leaders maybe an option for that.
- **34** from age 11-18 had very different religious views & experiences i.e. became more interested in Christianity. Feel it's a very broad age group to try n simply someone's faith during their teens as for the majority of my friends they became Christians at around the age of 14 & 15 so you're very split into which answer to tick as there are two different responses that are equally true.
- **44** SPELLING MISTAKES 'pverall' and 'your' ?
- **52** I'm involved with more than one of the options -make it so you can choose more than 1

NM

TIME: 20 minutes including writing notes

UNDERSTANDABILITY:

generally good – had to read a couple of questions twice to make sure she was clear what was meant but nothing obvious

- It might help to have a progress bar so folks can see how far they are through completion
- **32** – different experiences at different ages – either change the question so it is answered for childhood and teenage experiences or make it explicit when it should be answered
- **44** – spelling mistake
- **52 / 53** – need to make sure you can answer more than one option as intended

LH

TIME: 20 – 25 minutes

UNDERSTANDABILITY: 9/10

makes you think but generally flows well

- Progress bar might help – was hard to not know how far through you were
- **8** – part-time option?
- **28 / 30** relationship changed somewhat during these years
- **32** – different experiences at different ages –

AB

Time: 30-45 mins (including distractions!)

UNDERSTANDABILITY: 9 – 9.5/10

detailed a few things below which were unclear

- **34** - Changed between 11 and 18, question doesn't give opportunity to say that.
- **35** - Found this question hard to answer, since my dad's a minister, it was very regularly in a church context, but the opportunities for questions weren't at the point of being spoken to (i.e. would have to bring it up again at a later time), and since I had already been a Christian for a number of years by the time I got to that age, I was largely at the point where I was answering my own questions through bible study etc (I was one of those odd children). Maybe I'm a special case though...
- **44** - Would be nice to have an opportunity to say how things are now, as I feel this has improved since I was in the 11-18 age group.
- **50** - could be useful to be able to give a reason for why these have changed, if they have
- **64** - Possible to select multiple answers for each line (e.g. both baptised as an infant and not baptised as an infant)
- **65** - A little unclear if the Presbyterian part of "Attending a Presbyterian Church" is significant (I think you mean it to be). Possibly either bold the word Presbyterian, or add another option for attending a church of unspecified denomination.

AD

Time: 15

UNDERSTANDABILITY:

fairly straightforward

- **9** - no easy category for him: something about ministry / Christian work?
- **17** – “click next to go to Q21”
- **58** – change bracket to ?

NW

Time: 20

UNDERSTANDABILITY: 8/10

pretty straightforward;

- **13** – might be hard for those who have always attended?
- Age range questions as before

Changes made

- Progress bar added
- **8** – Question changed to “Which of the following BEST describes what you do mainly with your life? (If more than one applies, tick the ONE which is most central to your life commitments)”

“employed part-time” option added.

“go to Q10” added to “unemployed” and “full-time education” options

- 9 – Question changed to “If you are employed mainly...”
“Unemployed” option removed and “Faith-based employment” option added.
- 13 – added “(If you have attended your whole life put 0).”
- 14 – survey changed so that if “Yes” is selected in this question, participants are taken automatically from Q16 to Q21. (previously it was set so that if they selected “no” they were taken to Q17 but this has caused confusion)
- 17 – “click next to go to Q21” (to try to emphasise the need to miss Q18-20)
as 4 of the 6 who piloted ticked “no” but still completed Q18-20) – now this will allow for those who have left their “contact church” but attend NO other church to answer 17 but are not required to answer 18-20.
- 32 – although an individual’s experiences may change at different ages, it is difficult to allow for this, but the question is split into 2:
“Generally speaking, when you were a child (pre secondary school)...
“Generally speaking, when you were a teenager (11-18)....
In each case an additional line reads “(If this changed over time, try to reflect the average pattern. You can comment below if you wish.) and a text box is added to allow participants to add explanatory comments if required to express how this may have changed during this time period with the words “If you would like to make any comment to explain your answers please do so here.”

(Question numbers from this point on refer to the ORIGINAL question numbers)

- 33 – Changed to “Has anyone else in your wider FAMILY significantly influenced your faith and spiritual development.” (to emphasise that this refers to family only not peers etc).
- 34 – as a number of those who piloted commented that this changed over time, this question has been split into 2 to allow for changed experiences in age bracket 11-18 and now asks the same question for “at about 12 or 13” and “at about 15 or 16”
- 44 – spelling mistakes corrected
- 52 / 53 – multiple answers made possible
- 58 – bracket change to question mark
- 64 - multiple answers to the same question no longer possible
- 65 - changed to “Attending a specifically PRESBYTERIAN church”
 - 50 – a comment box is added to give participants a chance to say mention anything they consider significant (e.g. if this have changed or what factors are significant), with the line “If you would like to comment to explain your answers, please do so here.”

Changes rejected

- 17 / 18 - reverse order. Not appropriate as 18 will only required of those who answer 17 positively. Confusion which precipitated this question has been removed otherwise.
- 23/24/28/30 – although there may be change in a parent’s church attendance or an individual’s relationship with their parents during the teenage years (11-18), it was judged too complicated to change how this question is asked and the participants given the responsibility of choosing the “best fit”
- 33 – give explicit opportunity re friends / others?
- 35 – move up & make clearer that it relates to beyond immediate family? (not judged necessary).
- 44 – it was decided not to be necessary to ask how this has changed over time. I could have been repeated in section 10 but this may cause more confusion that it solves.
- 43 / 45-49 – it was decided not to make these “before you were 18” as this would not make any significant difference

Appendix 5 - Interviews

Appendix 5.1 - Profiles of interviewees

Amy was already 19 and just about to start her first year at University in England. She attends High Street Presbyterian which is a large congregation of 350-400 families in the middle of the small town of Downshire. She categorised herself as a “Strong and Active Christian” who attends church at least weekly.

Andy was 20 and attends the large rural congregation of Millvale, when he is home from university in England. Millvale has 300-350 families and is situated in the medium town of Ballyderry in West region.

Becca grew up in the rural village of Harbourville in East Region but now lives in Scotland with her partner, one of only 2 interviewees in a cohabiting relationship. Her former congregation is large (250-300 families) and situated in the middle of the village. She was 23 at the time of the interview and no longer professes faith nor has a church connection.

David lives in Northtown, growing up in a large urban congregation, New Church, which has over 700 families. He was 22 and in full-time employment still in the area.

Emma was 23 and is a full-time carer who attends 2nd Presbyterian Church in Ballymeeting village in North Region. The congregation is 350-400 families.

Helen was 21 and lives in Midtown, a small village in West region where she attends 2nd Midtown Presbyterian, a small church with 100-150 families. She is in her final year of university.

Laura was 18 and about to travel university in England from her home in Belfast. She attends a large suburban church Woodside Presbyterian which has over 500 families.

Neil was a 20 year old from the small village of Drumlinville who attends the large congregation there (550-600 families) in this rural area in South region. He is studying at university in England.

Nicky was 25 and no longer attends church, but once was heavily involved in a number of churches, including her contact church Hillmount, a small rural congregation (50-100 families) near the village of Ballypatrick in North Region. She studied in Northern Ireland and now works in Belfast and runs her own business in evenings. One of only 2 interviewees in a cohabiting relationship, she lives with her female partner outside Belfast.

Note:

Each of these names is a pseudonym and the details have been made anonymous to protect the identity of the interviewees.

3Appendix 5.2 – Example of a transcribed interview

AMY

Amy was already 19 and just about to start her first year at University in England. She attends High Street Presbyterian which is a large congregation of 350-400 families in the middle of the small town of Downshire. She categorised herself as a “Strong & Active Christian” who attends church at least weekly.

Amy, thank you very much for giving up your time, can you tell me a little bit about yourself, your age, where you are in your career or education and what you do and anything else you think is important for me to know about you.

Well I am 19, I turned 19 on 25 June so I was always the youngest in my year and I was actually held back a year in school, I should be going into my second year in university but I'm only going into my first because of a bad car accident, now I am going to university to study Business Administration and I have been going to church my whole life really and I have been a Christian most of the time so I think that is everything you need to know.

And you have been living at home up to this point apart from 3 weeks ago over the summer. How do you feel about the prospect of living away from home this year?

It was quite daunting in the beginning, last year I was freaking out but last year being in Aisia and I think you get to a stage where you are ready to move out, maybe you aren't getting along well with your parents sometimes or you are just ready, too many adults in the house. So I think yes I'm ready now and looking forward to it.

Did you always choose to study overseas or had to thought about at home?

I had applied to Queen's as well and it was my 3rd choice, but you can only choose 2 - all my other choices were aboard.

In terms of church where has your church been, has it been the same, what is your church connection?

In the beginning it was slightly mixed because my father comes from a brethren background and my granda and my granny are very high up in the Brethren church and took me every week to the gospel meetings, Sunday mission and everything, so I went to that till I was about 8 and then mum starting taking me, she was always Presbyterian, to ***** Presbyterian in (small market town, rural county Down), the gospel meetings were everywhere so I can't really say a specific place. I have been converted to Presbyterian ever since.

So you have been to (that Presbyterian church) pretty consistently since that time? (Yeah) And what sort of things were you involved in as a child, as a teenager in (your church).

Everything from Sunday school, bible class, going to youth club and now I'm taking youth club, going to GB and now I am taking GB, going to Youth Fellowship, now I am taking Youth Fellowship, so I have been to the mill, I have helped in BB a few times as well, but I sort of thought I need a night off so I sort of said no to BB.

In terms of how you come to faith and express your faith going to ask you a couple of questions about that, are you regular in your attendance at Sunday - would that be every week?

It would be every week – maybe there would be the odd week when I wouldn't go, maybe I would be somewhere else or be sometimes over the summer we would go to the caravan at Cranfield so I'd maybe go to Kilkeel Presbyterian church or even sometimes the Vineyard in Coleraine for some where different.

How would you describe your general connection to church both local and the church worldwide and how would you describe the place of church in your life.

It is very important to me, sometimes I come across very religious kind of a person even to my friends, they are know I am doing something in church, I am always doing something with the youth or something like that. It comes my top priority but then you have to have a balance as well, to do other things so you don't burn out so yea, yea quite high up.

We are going to go on a journey with this question, ask it now and then will come back to it and ask you slightly differently. In terms of your gut reaction to this what would you say based on your experience was the most important thing to keep people close to the church, to keep them strong in their faith, connected.

I think relevance - if you focus too much on the rules, "you can't do this" or "you're going to go to hell" or "you are not supposed to do that"; and also leading by example because there are people in our church, (not the minister), who don't do their piece, they are GB leaders and they are maybe getting drunk at the weekends or something and you are thinking "how is that setting an example to our young children in GB?" or another organisations you are talking badly about another person, the leader is talking badly about a little girl or about each other and I just think "this is not Christian, this is not what the mission of the church is"; so I think that is the biggest thing leading my example and it is not even rules it is love that you love everyone and forgive everyone, I think we focus, (especially the elderly generation in Northern Ireland), too much on rules, too much on what you are not supposed to do rather than forgiveness and what we can do because I think God gave us a life to enjoy and not to follow by rules and He give us freewill and we all make mistakes but He does that so we can learn from our mistakes and I also think relevance because if we are being taught stuff in the dark ages the kids aren't going to response to it they want something fun and because it is such a computer generation so everything powerpoint, music, videos, teaching styles have to change to move with that. And younger leaders, I think young people would look up to younger leaders rather than older people so to try and get more youth things involved and I think it would be easier, I find a lot of the time we struggle with what to do with our younger ones so even if the Presbyterian church gave materials that we could use, you know - different talks, different themes, different worksheets to get us thinking for different ages almost like a curriculum you know like school, I think that would help especially a lot of churches which haven't got the support from a lot of people that would help to sustain God's motion. I think that is one of the biggest... two big things.

That fantastic, very helpful, thank you. Are you a communicant member of (your church)?

No not as of yet, it is something I have thought about...I don't really know why I haven't - I just really didn't get round to it.

Have you ever been...has anyone ever said "would you like to come to communicant class" or...?

No one's ever asked, well not in terms of elders or ministers or anything - maybe my friends would be like "why aren't you doing this?" and I was "I don't really know, I haven't got round

to it yet”.

That is not something you are against? No it is not something I am against at all.

Where you baptised, have you been baptised?

No not yet, actually that's really embarrassing. **No, no - don't be embarrassed,**

I wasn't been christened and I haven't been baptised but I want to be baptised in... Israel!

Oh really? I want to get baptised in the Sea of Galilee, I just think that would be really cool.

Is that an ambition you have had for a long time? A long time yea, it is a bit on faith to go now at the minute with the whole thing that is happening. I hoping I will get there but if I don't' will have to make do with Northern Ireland.

I don't know if you know this, but if you are to become a communicant member of the Presbyterian church and you hadn't been baptised as a baby, you have to be baptised first, would that put you off then that desire - if you said "I want to be a member" and they said "you have to be baptised first" would you say "no I want to do that in Israel"?

No, it wouldn't put me off at all, I have no problem with being baptised it is more I haven't got round to it. **It wasn't something....** I don't really need it, I know my faith, I don't really need to say I'm baptised to tell everyone that I am saved, so don't really see the urgent need for it.

And your parents, would they not have had you baptised as a baby because that is not their beliefs?

My mum would have but my dad, from his brethren background, he doesn't believe in that, and I agree too because...ok, you're giving God a blessing onto the child but you can't say what they're going to be later in life, I think to be baptised or christened in the church you need to be a relevant age to know yourself if you are a Christian because there is no point being baptised if you're not or being christened if you're not going to be a Christian.

You made some reference already to other denominations what...how important is being a Presbyterian or belonging to a Presbyterian church specifically to you – is it significant or not?

I don't...it's not a huge significance, I don't really choose it for...because it's Presbyterian, I mostly choose it because I like my minister, I like my friends, it is where I have grown up. There's maybe certain things in other churches like Baptist which I wouldn't necessarily agree with, like having communion every week and things, or... not even that I don't agree with them, it is just not my tradition, not my way that I know about it. **It's not familiar?** But there are some things in the Presbyterian Church which I don't like, you know like you have to go through Kirk Session to get anything approved, we can't have a charity event without getting approval from the elders or we can't sell anything in church, so we can't have a bake sale to make money for our youth or... I hate things like that, I think "oh, that's so centuries ago", you have to move with the times; we can only have charity car washes and let's face it if it is raining nobody wants to go out and wash cars, so it is very hard then to raise funds. That would be most sort of the things I don't like about the Presbyterians, but I don't have anything else against other denominations.

Some of those things I might come back on, this is kind of a difficult question to answer in a sentence or two, I just want to ask you to describe your faith and where you are at in your faith journey now, what would you say.

I would say it is always in the forefront of my mind, you know before I speak I always think "oh, is this the Christian this to say?" or...I'm actually, you know, I feel really bad walking past a homeless person who is begging because I want to give them money but at the same time I don't know what they are going to do with that money, I would rather give them food, so it is always a constant thought I always feel God is with me. I'm not a very good prayer and I'd admit that, I find it, I would rather have a confidence that everything is going to happen right and I just have to trust in life and know that God is always with me. I feel bad sometimes if I pray when I need it but it's sort of more, I would pray in the car, not with my eyes closed or anything, there are certain people who worship different ways. I think everyone's faith goes through stages - some days, maybe for a couple of months, especially during ?? (*indistinct*) I wouldn't be close at all but I still have the faith but I would be not, you know, spiritual connection whereas other days I would be so full in the spirit, it just changes so...

I want to find out about the role church has played in your faith & your development as a young person, who would you say within your home congregation has been most influential & helpful in your faith.

There has been a couple, in bible class there was this great amazing guy, so full of the holy spirit all the time and he was so happy and he really passionately cared about everyone in our bible class and he was so evangelical, he would be singing and jumping - and it's quite unusual for Presbyterians to be like that! - but he actually left our church because I think people were sort of saying "you can't do that", that really annoyed me, it wasn't my minister, it was people in the congregation. But I remember he sort of... I was always sort of saved, I think when you are 5 you don't really understand, you sort of say a wee prayer but you don't really understand what you are doing, but whenever I was about 12, he did a sermon in our bible class about how he saw in our eyes if we were saved or not, he was looking straight at me and I thought "oh my goodness, like how did he know?" because I did believe but I sort of begrudgingly believed and then I just started to cry, don't know how I cried and said a prayer and after that I have just never been the same again. So he was the biggest influence and did all these amazing things about verses every week, more really spiritual verses not the boring ones not gonna say "for God so loved the world" is boring, but they are really well known.. **familiar?** He gave us all a folder each and, you just knew that he cared, so he was probably my biggest influence. There was another lady who was in the Junior Sunday School, and she was about 70, she was just like your granny but every granny's dream, she never nagged at you, she was just so lovely to you, you sat on her knee, (not that you would be allowed to do that anymore) and she was always so joyous and asking how I am and even now to this day she is in her 80's she is still asking me how I am, she is not that well health, she was always a big influence as well.

Is there anything else in terms of the how organisations run or opportunities that you have would you say experiences or opportunities that were particularly helpful to you in your faith development, or keeping you involved in the church.

I would say that... maybe not necessary in my church, maybe outside my church - different spiritual events like Summer Madness, things like that, because I found any new thing... I was very self-conscious as the time, not very high confidence and the people who were taking our youth fellowship maybe upper 6th or 1st year in university and I felt very, not confident in front of them, you know, almost feel inferior so I never really enjoyed doing that sort of thing in church maybe until I was about 15 so I don't really think anything helped me there, maybe

youth fellowship sometimes if was a good sermon or youth services in our church. It was more really outside church that helped me more.

Anything else apart from Summer Madness?

The one in Coleraine, I can't remember what it is called, **New Horizon?** yep , New Horizon.

The older group? I can't remember what it is called... I can't remember either but I went to those sort of things and SU in school. Teachers were really nice and they did really fun things and like the SU weekend, staying up to all hours and you could talk to everyone about everything and anything, which was really good. A lot of friends and having sleep-overs and talking to all hours about things we were worried about with the bible, comparing what we thought about things and talking to my grandfather just because he is so knowledgeable.

I want to talk about your family in a moment and I am really very interested to hear more about that.

But more recently taking youth fellowship and taking GB has really helped my faith grow because I have had to do research, I have had to do classes, had to do talks and I have had to talk to them about maybe things like relationships, sex, you know, so I have to know my stuff and that has really helped me grow too so think that is mostly the things.

Is there anything about your experience of church that has been difficult or unhelpful or damaging to your faith?

It has nothing to do with my church, it's the people in church, not the minister or elders or anything, more the congregation. I come from quite a well-off family and I don't mean to sound big-headed, but we are nice, we don't let anyone know we don't boast or brag or anything but people in, where my church is can be quite jealous and vicious and roll their eyes or say things about us or kick us when we are down. I overheard a lady talk about my family in a derogatory way and she didn't realise I was standing behind her and things like that I just feel "how can you take Sunday school on a Sunday morning and talk that way about people who haven't done anything to you?" So that is quite hard. And also my...my sister wouldn't be the same as me - I'm quite reserved and responsible and she is more outgoing, laughing and having fun but she is good, like she's not bad. **Is she younger or older?** She is younger and people would talk really badly about her, in GB there was an incident that a girl made up a rumour that my sister hit her and everything and just the way it was handled, I just didn't agree with the way it was handled. Also the fact that we can't organise anything without going through Kirk Session or the elders that is really frustrating because it could take weeks and then it is too late to do anything so that is probably what I find least helpful.

In terms of how other people speak to you and the relationships, how does that affect your faith, how do you overcome that, even?

Well it depends who it is because there are a lot of maybe, now 25 plus in our church maybe 30, who are so lovely and take a youth bible class for me to go to, I don't have to take it, they take it for us, all my age group, we have a midweek meeting a bible group, we eat buns and have coffee it is really great. We have a band that I'm involved in which really helps too because I feel I can get more spiritual that way, connect... So that helps. I can't remember even remember the question...

How does the negative experiences affect your faith?

Well those all would affect my faith positively, helps me get more enthusiastic, whereas the negative ones, I think make me stronger, I say "they can say that but only God can judge me" and it does put you down initially but I wouldn't say it hurts my faith, it more hurts me.

You made some reference to relationships with older people the likes of your Sunday school teacher and people like that, is that a common part of your church that young people would get the opportunity to mix with older people and get to know them?

Well we have different age groups. In our youth fellowship - probably the oldest would be 50 so there is always the opportunity to talk there to someone a little bit older but in Sunday school and in church other organisations like GB, BB, would have the likes of 70, so there is an opportunity.

Outside of organisations, would you ever get to know elders, adults other than your youth leaders?

I suppose just conversation. I would know most people and I think the children would know most people, just having the banter afterwards and having a coffee and biscuit afterwards.

Get a chance to get to mingle after church, that's great. Would you say that is important to you?

Sometimes I wouldn't necessary stay, I would, I'm quite busy, I would go home to help make the dinner whatever, I would mostly talk to them before or after church or evening worship or something like that, plus I don't drink tea or coffee so it is a bit awkward. But I see it as important for other people maybe like the older ones would talk, I would talk to my friends more than anything else, not really mixing.

Thank you that's helpful. I just want to think about family, you have made a number of references to your families faith, tell me about your parents involvement in the church and growing up how would you describe their faith?

My dad I always question, he always read me Bible studies when I was wee and everything and send me to church but he very rarely goes to church and sometimes I like to think it is because he hates the fact that people talk about him and say stuff and judge him for what he does, you know, my background and my class and things; and then other times I think, well maybe it's not really to do with that because as a child his father had him to church every night of the week and I think he was sickened of it, you know not that he rebelled but he went away, he had a different view than my granda, my dad is very open minded, very positive and he never forces us to do anything, he always says well, "look, it's your life and you need to make your own choices". So he wouldn't really go to church very often. My mum is there every week, does everything: dramas, Sunday school – everything; she doesn't really do GB or BB but mostly Sunday school. She is a teacher so she loves all that kind of thing. So it's mostly my mum, my dad rarely, only if I am singing or something which is quite hard. I have conversation with him and he just sort of says I don't need to go to church to be a Christian, I say "yeah, but it helps". You know sometimes it can slide, I know that he would drink, not a lot but he would get drunk and it upsets me, he would smoke and things and his views about sex aren't really what I think is right so that really hurts as well.

Your father's faith is... open minded faith, and your mum is very positive and very practical. How do you think that influenced you in your faith - were you conscious of taking in your parents faith and even the fact that your dad read you bible stories or was your experiences of faith growing up in your family very important, looking back?

It was more from my granda, not so much from my parents, my mum would have read bible studies and yes took me to church and everything and got me to read back my verses but I think it was my granda initially who did all that kind of thing.

What was it he did that was so important?

Meetin'! Always going to the meetin' down the road! Gospel meetings. And always doing like, you know, have me memorise my verses and had to say the same prayer every night: ask the Lord Jesus into my heart, and forgive my sins. Just that, and talking about the bible to him all the time, always praying before meals, (we never do that in the house) my granda every, always praying, I always see him praying on his knees when I was younger too, so that really influenced, I spent a lot of time with them when I was younger because they looked after me when mum and dad were working.

So you were consciously observing... or was it just was it not conscious?

You know what it was, I think he had instilled fear into me - instilled fear into me and I think - this sounds bad - I became a Christian for the wrong reasons because I was afraid of going to hell.

When you were little, as opposed to the experience when you were 12?

Yeah, but there is still a bit of fearing in there obviously you know I obviously want to go to heaven but that shouldn't be the main reason why I am a Christian so yea initially it was fear because they are quite heavy on "sinners" and "hell" in the Brethren church, so yea...

Thankyou, that is very helpful because I do think that peoples experiences are different and are important and yet everyone is different and we need to understand that. Is there anything else about your faith experience that is significant for you? You mentioned your mum's involvement in church now, as a fly on the wall in your house – what place does Christian faith have in your family life.

We never blame God for anything which I love. You know, some people are like "why is God doing this to me"; we never ever do that. I really find that amazing because as someone who's had quite a tough new year, just loads of things have happened and just things one bad thing after the next, we have never once blamed God; "it is just a test, get over it; He never gives us anything we can't handle and we all must have to learn from this". Mum would, if we were having an argument, mum would just start to pray in the middle of the argument and then that would change the tone of the situation. **Is that something that has always been or is it more recent?** More recent, maybe 4 years, maybe after the argument we would all say sorry it would be in particular me and my mum, we had a bit of a struggle between me and my mum and we would always pray afterwards and pray that God would help us in things.

That is very powerful. Sometimes I would roll my eyes because I wouldn't be in the mood to pray or connect with God so sometimes it would anger me but I just feel that she is doing it to try to calm me down, but she is being genuine. That is powerful, it sounds like it's a helpful thing. Is that something your mum, do you think, is that an expression of the faith journey your mum has been on?

Yeah. I feel I am the most involved person in church in my house, I would value it a lot more than anyone else, but that's not to say that they don't value it the same way. So my mum would be involved helping in Sunday school and helping with drama whatever that would be one day a week, whereas I would be 4 days a week. So I don't know where I have got my influences from mostly I'd say I would be...if anyone had a question in the bible they would come to me rather than my parents you know that kind of way. **You are seen as mature in faith? Yeah. Thank you**

I'm want to ask a little bit about young people's place in the church, that is something I am very interested in, how can we help young people to embrace their role in the church, their voice in the church. Growing up when did you most feel I'm part of this church?

Probably around now, the past sort of 2 years, I have been able to get involved with being a GB leader, a youth fellowship leader, a youth club leader that's made me feel really involved - being in the band, you know everything like that.

So particular roles have helped you feel you belong? Have you ever been aware of having the opportunity to having your voice heard or listened to your opinion, decision around church?

They listen to it, but you know the answer is going to be no straight away, which is hard, frustrating. For instance if we wanted to have a bake sale, or we wanted to have a 2 week mission, but they said no it is too short notice or even though it was 6 months or, some ridiculous things like that or in GB in particular they would have a lot of old people who are stuck in their ways which I absolutely hate and they also talk over each other, so I kind of stay out of the leaders kitchen and I talk to the girls who are my age. I have ideas - they are such in the dark ages! We are doing PE and the girls hate it and we are losing girls... Like, we need to change it up, need to do cool music, we need to stop the skirt in PE, wear trousers, "oh no, no, no - nothing like that". I am never listened to and I just feel I should keep my mouth shut because I am causing trouble more than anything but my leader, my captain in GB is amazing, she would be up for it, it's the other people. **It is the section leader as opposed to..?** There is a big argument going on now because the captain has changed the leaders around and they aren't happy, it is only a few of them but it only takes a few to make everything bad. **So it is kind of internal politics, within that organisation really?**

Whereas in youth club it is amazing, it is a different whole lot of people; I can do whatever I want, I can bake with them, I have sewed with them, we went for a walk - I wouldn't be allowed that in GB, oh no! Someone would get killed by a car or you know, it is more free I can do what I want in youth club, I think because it is not really church I am not preaching about God really, I am just getting people off the streets so it is more freed, I am free to do things.

How do you think churches can help young people to play a more active part, to have their voice heard, to be more part of...?

Give them more roles, you know in school how they have a student council, why can't the church have something like that but actually listen to them, you know, have regularly meetings, say what the kids wanted to do. Even in GB, they don't want to do the stuff we are teaching them about dancing hopscotch or why can't they give ideas of what they want to do, we can see if we can incorporate that in and they just... The young people is what we are doing it for so who knows then better and what to do than the young people, they know what they want to do, they know what will keep them interested so we need to talk to them to see what they are interested in so we can do it for them and don't shot down their opinions just because we are young doesn't mean we don't have a viable opinion or we don't have a good idea. **You think that happens very often.** Yea, yea, they think because we are younger than them we don't know better or we don't know as much as they do. You can't undermine people.

Have you ever heard of a thing called SPUD? Yes I went to SPUD!

I wasn't sure. That is something I have been involved in and very passionate about.

I think it is a brilliant idea but it's not carried through every church, it is brilliant for the whole

Presbyterian Church but maybe it is not implemented in every church.

One of the things, the guys (it is youth lead and we are trying to support them), they are really keen this year to empower and facilitate youth participation in local churches. This is a slight aside, but it is important, do you have anything towards them that could help churches, what do you think in your experience would be for this SPUD guys in your church to facilitate that kind of thing.

I think it is a brilliant idea but people don't like change. You know what I mean though, like if someone is sitting in your pew in church on a Sunday morning, you think "oh my goodness they are sitting in my pew" but it is not your pew! So I think it might ruffle a few of older peoples feathers, like "oh no we can't have this", people like "who do they think they are telling us what to do?" But they'll get used to it so maybe just preserve, you probably need somebody to come in and explain the set up and help them set it up and explain what the council is about and how regular the meetings should happen and how to listen to the young people and even if their idea isn't good to say "ok we'll consider it", you don't need to shoot them down. I think that would be the easiest and most, I don't know how to say it, it would ruffle less feathers put it that way, if they did it maybe quieter and not bombarding into them: "this is what is happening".

So it should not be divisive but more try & demonstrate, earn right to be taking seriously, kind of thing?

Yeah. I think it should be, I don't want to say forced but strongly encouraged that every church has a student council and just how to form it and what it would involve and what the meetings would involve or what they can decide or what you would talk about because you can't just start a council and think "what do we do now?" until they come. It has to be real.

Another area that I have been thinking about is the time of life that you are coming into: some people call it young adulthood or emerging adulthood. Would you consider yourself an adult? I know you have just turned 19 about to go to university...

Whenever I turned 18 I was so scared, "oh my goodness, I'm so not an adult, why have I turned 18?" But this past year, I think being able to drive really helps because you are independent, there just comes a stage where you can make your own decisions and you have your own bank card and things which helps you become an adult, so... yes in some ways I do but I still feel very vulnerable at times - still need a cuddle from my daddy or a snuggle from my mum at night you know.

How would you describe the period of your life that you are coming into, in terms of becoming an adult, what are the ...?

I think it is quite daunting, especially with all the recession comments, no jobs and having to fend for yourself and pay bills and there's just so much to worry about now that there used to not be. It is daunting but at the same time, I try to think well "God has my life sorted so I don't really need to worry about it", but it is hard!

In terms of your faith, what do you think people your age, 18- 25, people that age need from the church – how can the church support young adults?

Have things at more times - you know maybe one day a week there is something that won't suit a lot of people where they are at university or have a job. Maybe, it sounds really hard because I know people only have so much time to give, but if they had more things aimed at younger people, you know, a support group...because I find at our church, a lot of people my

age or older are the ones giving all the time they never get back so that can be hard on your faith - you don't really have time to grow your own faith, you are trying to grow everyone else's. I think that would be probably, I don't really know what else...

We have a take away group which is maybe 25 to 30s, there is nothing really for me.

????? I would have more fellowship with my youth leaders in our youth fellowship, all my age and we all meet up and have the craic but it is not really specifically for us, there's nothing really. There was a bible meeting midweek but it has stopped now, because that couple had a baby, so there needs to be more for that sort of transitional group and a social networking, some type of networking programme, a mentoring system or where people can just chat about things. There probably is something like that already but I don't really think they are that good.

Particularly as you go away, what will you be looking for in your church when you go away.

Probably just a wee text every so often from my youth leader or wee Facebook message saying I hope you are getting on ok, we are praying for you, that kind of thing and whenever I come back to feel completely like I have never left. Because I have noticed some people come into church, maybe they have changed but the relationships aren't the same, so just to be the same as if nothing has changed. And also I find a lot of my friends if they've moved away they don't go to a church which I think is really hard, maybe our church should try and make contact with their, like a couple of churches in the area before they go and arrange a meeting or family to welcome them in so that it is not as hard to go to church by yourself. I think that would be good.

You are going to Bath, what have you looked for there?

I have done all the research myself, Bath is quite small so probably go to Bristol, I am going to go church trailing, just find one I like every week and I think you will know when it feels right.

You might find CU does that, I don't know if there is a CU. Yep there is a CU. And I know there is a Girl's Brigade in Bath, (oh really?) in a Methodist church, so I am going to see if I can join there too.

What do you think is the most important to you faith as you go away from home in the context, what do you think will be the most important?

Christian friends, that is a big thing, because I don't drink but I would go out sometimes, and I am the only one who really doesn't drink and it can be a bit, if I am the person, it can be a bit hard to say "no sorry I don't drink" so it is always good to have someone there for support or not drink with you, not that I would be tempted but it just gets tiring to keep explaining yourself after a while. Also if you are having a struggle, some of my people I am friendly with who aren't Christian don't really understand why I have faith or why I am struggling in my faith, because they don't believe in God think you are talking this biggest pile of rubbish, so it is always good to have a Christian friend that you can bat ideas around with or they can help you out, or give you a verse. So I think that is the most important thing. A good church you can connect with, a good youth leader, or even a teacher or professor that is a Christian, you can just go to if you need to, I think that is the most important thing.

That is really helpful, we are coming near the end you will be glad. I want to come back to thinking about your faith experience - what would you identify as the highlights that keep you strong in your faith.

I think keeping involved in everything I am involved with, you know: GB, youth fellowship,

Youth club, and seeing how people, God works in their life and seeing people changed and seeing prayers being answered. That speaks for itself you can't say anything better than that. I get a lot from singing in church even though I am feel really embarrassed because I don't like bragging "I'm a good singer" or sometimes I think they think in church I love myself so that can be hard, I think no, "push it out of the way". Even in the house I would just sing the worship cd, sing to myself in the car, no one can hear me, so that really helps. I find I connect more through songs rather than really anything else.

In your experience of people you have known and so on, what do you think are the biggest reasons why people fall away from church and maybe lose their faith but what are the biggest factors?

Peer pressure. Everyone else is drinking and look like they're having an amazing time, having so much fun, they are curious, I want to be like that, don't want to miss out; and low self-esteem, trying to fit in. Actually a lot of people who are not confident and think "well, if I do this maybe I'll get confident and I will feel better about myself" or just trying to fit in, and that is a big thing! Or influence from their boyfriend, they're doing it or... there was an instance one of my good friends was going to become a Christian and her dad said if you do that and I'll kick you out of the house - you know things like that, that is hard. And if you're not very positive - I am a very positive person, some of my friends are quite negative, anything happens they are like "God is punishing me, why is God punishing me", I'm like "look - He's not, things happen in life, who says it is God?" God gets blame for way too many things, what about Devil - he gets blamed for many things he doesn't do, we have our own freewill, we make our choices. I think that is one of the biggest things - not going to church, because it does help to get bombarded with verses and even if you aren't really taking it in subconsciously you are. And definitely having a good set of Christian friends or a place you can go that you feel comfortable with Christian people because even if you did get drunk and you feel embarrassed or you feel that they will judge you, you are not going to go back to them, you're going to go even further astray whereas if they're going to love you and welcome you back maybe they can help you get out of a tough time. **Open door is important.** I think a prayer cell or even a few, or maybe how some people have counselling through the internet, you know have it anonymously, if there was a service like that for Christians where they could just right I am really struggling with this and somebody personally and not an automated message personally wrote back to them saying we'll pray for you, don't need to tell me your name, just keeping a check on them you know, I think that would be really cool just even if you weren't struggling just if you wanted to stay something happy.

Couple more questions, as you look ahead what do you think is going to be the most important to you in your faith? In a summary sort of way, what is going to be the most important for you?

Not forgetting time for God, always making time for it - we're all getting very busy and I will admit maybe haven't read my bible in 2 weeks, I feel so bad about it, just because things creep in and you get too busy and you don't make time for God, everything becomes more important, your job, you are meeting friends, shopping and things can come in place of God, so for me I would say the most important thing is not getting too busy for God because that can happen so easily and it can be really negative on your faith.

Last question, I want for this research to give a message to the church ?????about how young people can stay connected; what would you like the church to hear that would keep

young people connected strongly in their faith?

I don't, I'm not slagging the church or anything, what they do is amazing, they have got so many good things about it, maybe a few bad things but what they would really need to work on for the young people is just trying to keep them interested, you know have a different worship night, with really good Christian bands that you can get loads of churches together to worship all mix and make those different then and what I think Exodus do is really great is people come from miles, I have friends from Ballymena now, I'm from Dromore, they come to my house, I go to their house, you know just mixing events. And I think, having curriculum, not a curriculum that sounds bad, but materials for people who are struggling in their church to connect with young people or teaching relevant things can use if they are stuck, that is the biggest thing because I know some churches haven't a clue and set 2 year old to colour in a verse about Jesus and they have no clue they can't even read. So I think that is one of the most important things is having a network, even resources online that you can get ideas from, having more youth events, trying to encourage younger songs in church, more instruments, using their talents, getting young people up to play the violin even if they sound horrible. To sing a song, we only do that on children's day, why can't we do it once a month. That they feel the church isn't boring any more, look there is my mummy up there I can wave at her from the front, I think that is one thing that differently should happen more. And having a council inside each church where the children can get involved mixing with the older people and not feeling inferior and put down.

Anything else you want to say I haven't asked you about.

No I think that's everything. Can we try and change people too, so that they're all lovely and don't talk about each. To be a counselling service, don't know if you have seen the movie "Mean Girls" where they all fight with other and then have a big talk and the catch each other by falling backwards and they become best friends? Maybe we should have that in church were everyone would become best friends!

Everything you have said has been very helpful. Thank you!

Appendix 5.3 – additional quotes from chapter 7

The following are additional quotations not used in chapter 7 or full versions of abridged quotations which appear within the chapter.

Experiences of living away from home

I just thought about leaving home and everything I was leaving behind rather than all these new experiences and new challenges I was going to get, but whenever I went away - drink is massive! I was like 'I don't drink' which was a blatant lie – oh, it was so difficult at times because everyone was, I was the only Christian in the whole house and there were 8 flats of 6 so what's that 48 of us ... It was sort of everyone's aim to get me drunk and I was like 'no, I don't get drunk' and then I was amazed how people ask questions like 'do you not believe in sex before marriage?' and 'why do you go to church?' (Andy)

Uni has been great, it has been a real learning curve too, just because when you live in (my town), you are sort of in a bubble and then you go to uni and people's attitudes, Christians attitudes change towards so many things. Like going out on the rip is a big thing at uni because some people believe it is fine but other people are like 'no do not you dare, you'll die, you will go to hell if you drink alcohol' or just different views on stuff so you have to... I suppose it means you shift everything and rethink everything so uni was a big thing. (Helen)

'It's just a real culture shock and I really struggled with that for a while but then God provided Lynda and then I had her and then I got a small group, ended up actually when I started uni, I was out more nights in the week than them doing other stuff, so Uni was great, it was good thing for me to do but I had to set off with the mind-set that I wanted to live my life this way and not this way.' (Helen)

'Took a year out, and went to (overseas) for 6 months... That's going to have played a massive part of the reason why I'm still connected to God... I don't think I could cite how much help it has I feel that God over these 6 years, he was just slowly striving to point me in the right direction and He was like I have you for 6 months and that is really when I am going to sort stuff out and He did.(Neil)

Parents' faith

'My dad I always question, he always read me Bible stories when I was wee and everything and send me to church but he very rarely goes to church and sometimes I like to think it is because he hates the fact that people talk about him and say stuff and judge him for what he does, you know, my background and my class and things; and then other times I think, well maybe it's not really to do with that because as a child his father had him to church every night of the week and I think he was sickened of it, you know not that he rebelled but he went away, he had a different view than my granda, my dad is very open minded, very positive and he never forces us to do anything, he always says well, 'look, it's your life and you need to make your own choices'. So he wouldn't really go to church very often...I have conversations with him and he just sort of says I don't need to go to church to be a Christian, I say 'yeah, but it helps'. You know sometimes it can slide, I know that he would drink, not a lot but he would get drunk and it upsets me, he would smoke and things and his views about sex aren't really what I think is right so that really hurts as well.' (Amy)

I love my dad, I get on so well with him and he is like my best friend as well but I don't know, we don't talk about it that much. Is he involved in church? Not in a leadership role, it is quite hard because he has got a job that requires him to do work on Sunday's sometimes...I don't know whether it's like... men almost think it is an unmanly thing to do, but my dad's not a hard man or anything but...' Andy added that his father was not brought up in a Christian household; 'his dad wasn't like anti Christian and he got sick with cancer and then turned to God during that so he was really strong by the end of it, before he was called home and my granny goes to church, you know there is just some people that just go to church because it is the 'done thing' so I don't know.' (Andy)

Family practice

- *from 11-14 I went to church with my mother and sister most weeks*
- *My parents were divorced so this is somewhat inaccurate as I lived with my non Church attending mother rather than my father who was a minister in PCI. Therefore the results vary depending on which parent I consider. Additionally I would have attended church on a weekly basis on my own.*

Going to church on a Sunday morning together...If somebody said to me 'Church: what's the first thing that comes into your head about church?' - Sunday morning, into the car, going to church as a family and sitting down in the pew, and somebody turning round and going 'there's the Gibson family'. That's what sticks out in my head as a family community. Cos it doesn't matter if you look round the church there's going to be a block of family; that's my influence: my mother and father. I would say if they didn't go to church I don't know where I'd be sitting now, because it's them that has got me...I enjoy going to church and look forward on Sunday morning to go to church. I would say it's me growing up in a church... Fluency - my mother and father going, grandmother and grandfather going – I would say that is the thing' (Emma)

So I don't know if there was a right way or a wrong way but I know for me when I have children I want to be the parent that... I don't want my children to go to Sunday school because I think that is my job to teach them. Like I don't think they have to go to Sunday school, Sunday school is for the children that don't have it, that don't have that at home; I think I needed Sunday school but I don't think my children need Sunday school... I just think when it is me and I have children I think it is my responsibility to teach them; it is my responsibility - I want to teach them to pray, want to teach them to read, colour in with them, I know they need the fellowship of other children but sure they can go and play with other children, like Sunday school is another school, they go in and sit round a table'. (Helen)

I know I do remember vividly my grandmother, my father's mum – she was very, very devout to her faith as was my uncle and my grandfather. They were all a very very ...I want to say strict but at the same time they wouldn't remind me of what had been strict in a stern way... I always feel when I went to my granny's with my father it would be a case of you would feel the faith more in the house than you would in ours. You would definitely notice it more fully... I always felt as if I was on strict behaviour for a long, long time. Until I then realised in later life that they were not just as bad they just weren't as scary and I say that they softened me up a bit more to the fact that people can still have these devout faith and have it in the house but they won't impose it as the way I remember it as a child.' (David)

'I never remember mummy or daddy reading to us or praying with us but I do remember granny and granda doing it. Like I remember staying at granda's house and every night after the news, half ten, granda and granny both got down on their knees, granny read like the daily reading notes and then the Bible and then the both of them prayed and they made you like every time you stayed they were like 'you sit down, you get down on your knees and you pray'.

Granda taught us a prayer, 'If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take' and granda taught us things like that there but mummy and daddy never really carried it through; that was mummy's parents. I don't remember mummy and daddy ever doing that. I remember my other granny prays and reads the Bible all the time; she was in hospital there and you walk in and she says the Bible would be sitting there and you say 'granny, you want me to read it to you?' and granny was like 'uh-huh that's right, uh-huh that's right', so granny's godly and stuff. So I don't understand how it sorta skipped mummy and daddy but they just don't talk about stuff like that, just don't...maybe I don't know.' (Helen).

'probably the only experience of family and faith was whenever I would go to their house and as my granny was putting us to bed like 7, 8 year olds, she would have every night said the Lord's prayer with us just before we were going to bed, that was probably the only real influence that she had, bringing us to church and coming to displays. But I think as I've gotten older, she has even had discussions, because she knows my parents aren't Christians so she has been having discussions about 'oh, maybe your mum and dad are going to church' and that is brilliant I have been praying for them and she would, my granny would be very...a big influence on me and actively encouraged it and I think my aunts and stuff would be Christians as well but not as in an active way as my granny would be with me. (Laura)

- *Discipleship group because it explained the bible clearly and youth club because I meet others my age. It was particularly good when I first moved to (my town) as it helped me be involved in church and get to know peers in my area. I went to school in a different town so I enjoyed having people my age nearby where I lived.*

Role of the church and individuals in it

'there were certain kind of youth leaders that you developed a kinda relationship with that you kinda thought 'this is someone I could trust if I had questions I can go to and look to' and they don't judge you they just accept what you're saying and help you move forward... just their honesty and acceptance. I think they have to be people that have a fun personality, you know, you can go round and have a bit of banter with them, a bit of craic but know that, number one if you tell them something they are going to keep it confidential, they are not going to spread it round, that they're going to look to help you whenever way they can. I think there has to be a space for that I mean...' (Nicky)

Laura realised that the spiritual maturity of leaders could be very important; 'I think the leaders of my youth fellowship and GB would be maybe 20's or 30's so that sort of younger age, but the leaders of the house group are 40, 50 and I think that has made a huge difference because I think they are a bit more – they're obviously more mature because they are older and I think it has been a more of a different sort of role model, I have really enjoyed being with them'.

Sacraments

*It is very important like, because that is one of the two sacraments isn't it, the Lord's Supper? But I think I disagree with how my church brings people into the table, into the Lord's Supper... Well the way it is structured in my church is that you come to age. **What age is that?** I think it's 16 - yeah 16 and it is almost like it is the 'done thing' rather than you do it because you want to do it, it is just sort of along a pattern, you know you go from junior bible class to senior Bible class, communion. **It is almost a rite of passage?** Yeah. **Has it always been that way?** As far as I know in my church anyway. **Do you think that is the way the minister would want it or is that the way it has always been?** I don't know I have never thought of that, it is*

probably just - I don't imagine it's the way he would want it, I know that there's probably people probably that aren't Christian that are committing themselves to it and it is something very serious and I don't know how if they take it just how serious that it actually is. **How do you think should be done?** I think it should be done whenever someone comes to faith themselves and they have to decide well 'I am ready to take this step' or not. I don't think age should determine it at all, I'm not saying that a 3 year old should but once you have an understanding of how important it is and what it means I think around then. **Could you have been a communicant member earlier than 16?** Yeah I think someone could be earlier than 16 but also like any age. **Why is it important, why does it matter to you?** Because it is remembering Jesus, the price Jesus paid for us and it is a time we really want to, sort of, bring everything that you have before God and, yeah.... I also think we should do communion more often because I don't understand why different churches have then, why, why does some churches have it every week, why to do some churches have it once a month, why do we have twice a year. (Andy)

I think growing up I was always a bit... I didn't really know about it, I was naive, I just thought that I was coming to church therefore I was a member and I think whenever we started to stay in at the service at night time and they started to do communion that was the first, I was maybe 13 or 14, that was actually... I had never actually seen communion done before I'd just heard about in the Bible and stuff and then whenever I saw it being done in church I thought "this is different" and they gave out the cards and things and then people explained that becoming communicant member is how to become part of the church, I think whenever I got to that sort of age, especially with my family not being a Christian family it was kind of a statement that I was making that, like it was my - like I belonged to the church but also a statement to my family that they were able to come along and see me step forward and say that, like proclaim in front of everyone that Jesus is my Saviour and I have become part of the church - I think that was quite important whenever I was doing it at that age.' (Laura)

'I became a communicant member...I suppose it was between upper sixth and first year of uni. I became a communicant member in the May following so I was 18, I think. I just felt it was the right thing to do. **Why?** Because I wanted to be baptised and I hadn't been as a child because mummy and daddy weren't or anything and I went to those classes and I suppose I had some understanding and I felt it was the right thing to do at the time; I questioned it after but now I stand by it again... **You said that after you became a communicant member you weren't sure of it but now you are? Are you glad that you are?** I don't think it makes a difference; the only difference it makes is you take communion. **Is communion important to you?** Yea, Yes but I think we should do it more often because... **4 times a year?** Yeah, 4 times a year - every quarter. I think it is a very solemn thing, it is a solemn in church, it is solemn and like I know it shouldn't be 'ohhhh' all exciting and stuff but I think, I don't know how to word it. It is more of a thanksgiving thing you are doing it for really, I know you are remembering Jesus dying but Jesus rose again and I think the way it is done is it is dwelling on Him dying, do it in remembrance of him and all. (Helen)

I don't really get the infant baptist thing because people just misunderstand it ... there is people who just come to church who are just good living and they think you know "I will just baptise my child and sure she'll get to heaven" and if there wasn't that opportunity to do that then they wouldn't have that believe so I'm glad mummy and daddy didn't baptise us and I don't think I'll baptise my children and I know that of course in the Presbyterian church it is all about the congregation making a promise to bring that child up and pray for them and everything and that's fantastic but I think the church should be doing that anyway whether it has been baptised or not. (Emma)

I was obviously a baby whenever it happened and I think whenever I was becoming a member of the church and then taking my first communion there were lot of people my age getting baptised and I thought that it would be...not I wished I hadn't been baptised as a child but I

thought it is a really nice decision to come to on your own, especially a lot of them here have Christian parents, it was really lovely for their parents to see them as a 15, 16 year old Christian get baptised and make that decision... coming to the decision on your own to do it, I think it would be, I think if you've come to your own decision on it, it would mean more importance, because I would understand what is happening as it was being as I am being baptised I think it would be more of a relationship thing with God as opposed to something that... well I suppose at the end of the day baptism for a baby is a nice symbol as well for the parent side and hopefully whenever I have kids I'll get to baptise them as a kid as well. (Laura)

Church membership & Presbyterianism

Have you transferred your membership back to Drumlinville? *No that's, to me that's not relevant, the whole membership thing... Your membership, what does membership mean to you?* *The membership is being part of the family and I think that the minute anybody walks in the doors they should be a member, so there is obviously better things to that because I was really stuck on reading another book, it's called 'Walking with Gay Friends' and one of the things that they said is, she was doing a case study of two gay people that were Christian and were really involved and started an open gay relationship with each other and it was the responses of the church and one of the responses of the church was, you have a week to break up with this person and if you don't break up with them you can't be a member of the church and then she said that the other churches experiences were much more positive, she said continue to be a member da da da da.....and it said all that good stuff. But then it said but if you do decide to maintain this relationship long term you do understand that it would be difficult to be a member of the church and that surprised me, but I think the Bible does say that we have to be careful of our membership for the yeast that can get in, but the business of membership: church is not a club, church is not a restaurant that we go to and get served, church is a family. I heard a guy say it is a family meal and to me that makes a lot of sense so in terms of membership, it is not important to me cause I also know that, I ask myself would membership be important to God but God says all who believe take part in communion, if you are a believer share this bread and this wine, not if you are a believer but you have also filled in a card so... But then I think I am young and don't have a need to be a member of a church so being a member of the church can be a good thing and there is good to it. (Neil)*

*I would say it is really important to me... I really like my church's teaching, I think my minister is really good, he always, like his sermons always has a nice introduction and they make sense. Is Presbyterianism important to me, being a Presbyterian, yeah? I want an honest answer.... Well, to be honest I think we are all part of Christ's church, and I am a Presbyterian but at the same time I am a Christian, and we are all Christians together, so does it...if you a Christian we are all, sort of... we are all one anyway, does that make sense **So it matters but it doesn't matter?** Yeah, pretty much... I think the structure to the service; I really like our service as a structure. Yea I like the structure and I quite like the worship as well. It is so different from my church in England...whenver you come to a Presbyterian church you are there to focus on God and worship Him, whereas other churches it is almost as like oh look at the pretty pictures and worship God through them rather than focussing on him alone.' Helen too highlight the importance of preaching in the denomination 'I wouldn't be Church of Ireland because their centre point is not the Word, it is what is it – is it the remembrance table or the font or something? It is not, and even in the church buildings the pulpit is not in the middle and I think the pulpit is the centre so that should stay there so I agree with that Presbyterian bit. (Andy)*

I used to be - first year of uni, 'I'm Presbyterian and proud', now I am not proud to be a Presbyterian because just of splits and people and someone says what church do you go to, I just say church of Jesus Christ, I'm a Christian, I don't say; 'no but seriously, where do you go to' – 'I'm a Christian, I don't want to tell you where I go to because it doesn't matter where I go

to'. Um, I think people dwell on it way too much, like it just gets people in arguments, like. I think things like method of baptism and how many times communion is taken shouldn't even be talked about because everyone just argues about it and I think that is what the devil wants us to do so I don't think it is necessary to even talk about it so I wouldn't label myself any more. I don't want to be known as Helen the Presbyterian, I want to be known as Helen the Christian. (Helen)

Participation

- *Allowing me to put my ideas forward - even having a suggestion box at the back of the church to allow all to have an opinion*
- *To be made to feel welcome and involved in activities*
- *The opportunity to be involved*
- *Being a leader at different organisations*
- *I actually enjoy going to church but would like to be more involved in the running*
- *Give young people more of a voice... in my church I have no say at all, everything is very traditional, and we are never allowed to worship the way we want. My church mainly consists of older people who are at times reluctant to changes and new ideas. I think allowing young people some control over services and how some things are run, will make them feel more involved and needed*
- *remember that teenagers are the next generation, and we have to be kept readily involved in church life because we'll need to gain experience and knowledge in how to run things when our time comes. Not to be cast aside or looked down upon because we are 'kids' or 'young adults'*
- *Attending reformed Presbyterian camps- excellent teaching and other young people committed to Christ. Summer teams- studies on evangelism, prayer, hearing other people's opinions, hearing examples and advice from older ones, being a witness for God.*
- *The Scripture Union I went to was at school and I have to admit that the teacher was very encouraging and helped me a lot to tell others about my faith.*
- *Bible study in student group (Navigators), Discipleship Training School with Youth with a Mission in (Africa).*
- *Leading a section in my own church's Holiday Bible Club opportunity to serve at a Bible Camp in Canada for a summer leading the Sunday morning youth programme*
- *Opportunities to work in places that are socially deprived in NI*
- *The teams going away as I was outside my comfort zone and I could see how God is at work in different places and that God doesn't work the way I expect him to. God can work in different cultures and according to those cultures. God is bigger than how I think.*
- *Outside: helping with CU stalls in uni, speaking directly to people about Christianity- openly chatting and being ready to take on questions which normally can't be answered! Inside church: one to one conversations with others dealing with issues and working through them together and with God.*
- *I have organised some prayer events over the last couple of years by suggesting the idea to Session and then carrying through the idea on their agreement; this makes me feel I have a voice in wider church life*
- *At the moment the same people make decisions and organise everything*

- *I belong to a Presbyterian Church where they believe strongly in tradition and doing things that way because they have always been that way.*
- *Youth leaders and elders often ask our opinions on new ideas for youth programmes.*
- *The current church has an ability to include everybody and make sure that the workload is evenly spread between everyone so everyone can partake and also be heard during meetings.*
- *Don't throw them aside and let them have a voice within the church, also try to cater for the young adults' needs within the church. Too many people are discontent with change and because of that they prefer to keep things the way it's always been, if this keeps happening then young adults will become disillusioned with Church life as it is and not gain a true passion for serving God. ...if there are young adults who are willing to serve and do what they can, don't treat them like mules, but at the same time, don't give them responsibilities that may discourage them because they feel patronized, everyone has a role to play in the church and if that role is not catered for then they might stray off and could possibly backslide in their faith.*
- *Let them have a voice, support them in their vision for evangelism and discipleship, and community. Don't let tradition get in the way but make sure that in your wisdom you teach us how to be Holy people of God. Pray for us. Be ok with change as long as it is Biblically sound. If you see positive behaviour within young people encourage it, get on board, walk along side them, show them that because Jesus cares you do.*
- *Don't throw them aside and let them have a voice within the church, also try to cater for the young adults' needs within the church. Too many people are discontent with change and because of that they prefer to keep things the way it's always been, if this keeps happening then young adults will become disillusioned with Church life as it is and not gain a true passion for serving God...if there are young adults who are willing to serve and do what they can, don't treat them like mules, but at the same time, don't give them responsibilities that may discourage them because they feel patronized, everyone has a role to play in the church and if that role is not catered for then they might stray off and could possibly backslide in their faith.*

I can't remember anything that I've ever suggested or said was really...It's more of a case of my church with the youth groups and BB and stuff. If you had an idea or something, they would hear your voice and it may be discussed or it might not go any further than that – it would all depend on what way your idea is – is it a viable idea or is it silly or away from what they're looking at. (David)

It is going to have to start changing now, it will not change immediately but our generation has to change that. Like there is no point going out of church now and saying old people you have to let the young people have their voice, 'cause they will be like "they haven't done it, like they have only been in the church, or been active in the for about 3 years so what is the point of letting them do it?" I think if our generation grows up with the fact that we don't want people to be known as blow ins, we don't want people feeling discouraged, we don't want people to have set seats, like that will carry through and that will be tradition rather than the tradition that it is now. Well first of all, they have to pray for it and they have to pray accepting that there has to be change, like there has to be change or else, they have to accept that we are the generation that needs to make that change, so they need to spur our generation up and prepare us for the change, so prepare us to change tradition and get rid of it, so preparing us to not be a congregation, not be a body of people that... a body of people that's welcoming people, that is what we want - we want to be more welcoming, want to be more supportive, we want to be mentored, so we want a mentor. So if we are mentored by the older ones, we can mentor the younger ones. Prayer, support, mentor and I guess the opportunity to do it and not put us in a box. (Helen)

Developmental needs and the place of emerging adults in church

- *hoping there will be more for the youth, youth bible studies/ fellowship (atm there is nothing!)*
- *would like there to be more organisations for people my age group within my church.*
- *Ability to ask questions/express doubts about faith in an open, non-judgemental environment.*
- *important issues for Christians moving from childhood to adult issues*
- *I think it is important that young adults are included in the life of the church. Having a young adults group at First has been really important in staying 'plugged in'. Its great to be able to get together as a group.*
- *Awareness of the problems developing as a Christian at these ages, particularly as they go further and further from the home and Church that comfort them.*
- *closeness, trust that what is said in the group..stays with the group, strong friendship and good banter*
- *Because they are generally the leaders of the youth organisations and they need to get themselves in the right place with God before they can lead younger people*
- *I have so many friends who have stopped going to church, because of things like drinking, girls or even work. At 18+ I think we need something that discusses the taboo issues, that answers our questions and encourages us to serve our friends and families.*
- *openness a transition period and engagement with peers!*
- *keeping them within the church, discipling them to become the people God wants them to be*
- *There is a definite need to provide something in the church for university aged people and older, this is the age when most young people go 'off the Christian path' and there is little offered in the church to give them any reason to come back. Much is expected in the way of service from young adults but often little is offered to give them encouragement and help specific to their age group. In fairness, the church is trying though.*
- *The church should listen actively to young people & gravitate towards them to continue the growth of the church.*
- *Spiritual development and friendship - those aged 18-25 are often very busy juggling school/uni/work with friends and serving in church. It can be difficult to be disciplined enough to have some quiet time with God amongst this busy-ness. An 18-25 group could provide a set time in the week for such development with the bonus of fellowship at the same time.*
- *to me this age group is not acknowledged in my church we are left out on a limb too old for youth club and too young for any other group. it is important because I feel we need the most help and guidance with faith as we are the most easily influenced group with a lot of peer pressure in our way of getting closer to God.*
- *I found my views on many things during this time changed and that although I am grateful for my upbringing in the church it left me very sheltered. I think that churches need to allow young people to question the churches accepted view on some topics, particularly in Northern Ireland where culture and religion can often become confused. Many will have made either choices or mistakes that they feel will cause others in the church to judge them. These people need to find a way to be accepted into church without denying who they are. I have also never been as busy as I have been during the last few years - churches*

need to understand that young people developing careers, studying, maintaining friendships, developing relationships, maintaining family relationships and in some cases looking after children.

- *As I am the age of 20 I feel there is nothing for our age, to keep the 18-25 group going to church. For example you've GB, BB, youth fellowship but nothing for us. But at the same time I'm not sure what would need to be done, as I wouldn't really know what everyone would want. It's a very hard age to work out*
- *Just more organisations activities and outings for the younger people within the church. I also think something like youth services just for the younger generation. But I think the main reason that people aged 18-25 are not staying involved is most go off to university and colleges.*
- *I think that between 18-25 many young adults go to university (maybe in England), get jobs, get married etc. and therefore because of all the changes that they are going through, can find it hard to stay involved in church life. I think that congregations need to be mindful of those that are 18-25 and run groups for our age group. Young adults can struggle to find their place in church life because they are too old for youth events and yet feel may feel too young to attend women's or men's groups that have no age limits. While this is not the case in our church, I have friends who have struggled because of this in their churches.*

Whenever I turned 18 I was so scared, "oh my goodness, I'm so not an adult, why have I turned 18?" But this past year, I think being able to drive really helps because you are independent, there just comes a stage where you can make your own decisions and you have your own bank card and things which helps you become an adult, so... yes in some ways I do but I still feel very vulnerable at times - still need a cuddle from my daddy or a snuggle from my mum at night you know...I think it is quite daunting, especially with all the recession comments, no jobs and having to fend for yourself and pay bills and there's just so much to worry about now that there used to not be. It is daunting but at the same time, I try to think well 'God has my life sorted so I don't really need to worry about it', but it is hard!' (Amy)

I think it is more of a maturity, that is what I'm expecting will happen, I think become an adult is what I expect is going to happen to me whenever I live away from home and I think that involves becoming more mature and because I am going to have to live on my own and do things for myself I suppose. Yeah, just a maturity.' (Laura)

I think, I wasn't there so I don't really know but I think I mean there is lots of big decisions and big changes that happen between the ages of 18 and 25 like, realistically most people meet their future other half's in that sort of time so I suppose as stupid as it sounds education and different things around that financial education, just a lot of areas that nowhere really covered, I know churches are supposed to be about nurturing your faith with God and things like that I think there is room to look at helping young people in, not more practical ways but you know, your faith comes into your relationship if financial difficulties come you know if you have your faith behind you are going to have your morals behind you and you are going to try and work through those things, whereas without faith, without your morals, not without your morals but with lesser morals, there is lot more opportunity to walk away, so I suppose longer term in the church is seeing a lot more breakdowns whereas it is a gap that nobody filled, the government aren't filling it, so that is something the church could spend in. (Nicky)

'You really want to get a sense of community, don't you? I think the sense of community and the sense that you are loved by the church, and how important you are to that church, I want to feel that you a part of that, you definitely want their prayers and support in every way like the minister contacting me is a big one as well and showing that they care and just reminding that no matter where you go like whether I am that side of the street or the other side of the world, that Jesus is with you, God is with you were ever you go and that your church is always

supporting always, like something to lean on whenever you need, you need help or support or whatever and that someone is just a phone call away, like it doesn't matter if you come from a Christian household in that respect like, that there is someone there from your church that cares...' (Andy)

Obviously, if they started doing debates like I was saying earlier I would definitely be along and drink my cup of tea. Definitely, you know, although my faith isn't there now I do or as I've quite rightly said that I'm glad, I don't regret my upbringing and I would want my children raised in the same way so then I have discussed with my partner before you know – maybe the church should be involved. Because whether or not faith goes on it's a good foundation, so things like that, so...but not for a while yet! (Becca)

How to keep 18-25s close to church

- *Continuing my Christian faith - I want to go to learn more*
- *At the last census 13% of the people in Northern Ireland claimed to have no religion while the U.K. as a whole around 15%. These numbers have dramatically increased over the last 9 years and it is clear that we are moving towards a secular nation, even if Northern Ireland is a little slower to catch up. If the Presbyterian Church cannot see why young people are leaving the church in great numbers then I suggest they try reading the book that they believe in so passionately and if they believe homosexuality to be wrong while openly promoting slavery and human right violations and atrocities that our all in their 'good book' then they have nothing in common or to offer the great majority of people who believe in a moral and just world. 'Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence' theists have none for the existence of any god. People's ideas may not change but people do die and their ideas will go with them, the same can be said for all religious organisations. I look forward to the day when churches all across Northern Ireland are being turned into places of worth instead of what they currently are.*
- *More scholarly debate on scripture. The Bible has been and always will be open to interpretation, and so there are no key values that are sacrosanct and beyond debate. Debate and openness are the keys to remaining relevant in a rapidly changing society. Not just reacting to change but anticipating it.*